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THE WILDERNESS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE LOVE CHILD

A NOVEL

Crown 8vo Second Edition

THE WILDERNESS

BY

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TO MY WIFE

THE WILDERNESS

BOOK I

THE SEED

CHAPTER I

THE sound of the organ was still'd in the land. Old Dan was down at last—Dan Maywood, who had seen the mining town range its tents along the plank-laid roadway dwindling into a bush track, as it mounted the hill that led to the soldiers' camp. Now it was a city, and "the good old days" of lawlessness, luck, and adventure were at an end. "Digger hunting" was a thing of the remote past, and only a few grey pates recalled "Joe! Joe!" the once familiar signal announcing the troopers, out on a licence raid.

He was propped up in bed in a room of the little cottage he had built out of the savings which he, the organ and Napoleon had, by their combined efforts accumulated. Dan was bell-ringer and crier to the community, a survival of primitive years, and retained on sufferance; though nowadays when the mayor wore a robe and a gold chain, and the city clerk was housed in a fine office, there was little need of his services. Napoleon was at present leisurely eating his fill in the shed at the end of the yard.

He had contracted a full habit, as the tailor delicately describes it in elderly gentlemen, and his ears drooped with a suggestion of pensive retrospect. Once Napoleon had been the only donkey on the goldfield—the pet of the diggers' children, receiving many a carrot from pioneer hands to whom he brought memories from an older land. In intervals of bell-ringing and public crying by his master, he had submitted to the indignity of drawing the organ. He would stand patiently in the hot summer sun with half-closed eyes, unmoved by the blare of trumpets and the orchestral death-rattle that simulated a roll of drums in Dan's street-organ. The organ itself was affixed to a neat spic-and-span conveyance, the turn-out being kept spotlessly clean.

At six o'clock in the morning, winter and summer, wet or fine, Dan was at the shed swilling Napoleon with water, then rubbing him dry with a wisp of hay, meanwhile siffling through his teeth in true professional style.

In earlier days fathers prospecting in such outlying parts as the Dead Horse Ranges or Gum Tree Flat, would borrow a horse that by careful steering could be kept on the straight and narrow way, to drive "the missus and kids" to the township to see Napoleon and hear the organ. There were few sights beyond the periodical circus and the revival tent in those days. Later on depressed camels and disconsolate lions, who knew not the jungle, came that way in the train of the colossal Cirque de l'Europe and the world-famed collection of wild beasts (*vide* the flamboyant posters). These were accompanied by a terrible piece of mechanism known as a steam-piano, which made night hideous. Thus the glory of Napoleon and the organ departed. But in the heyday of their prosperity, when Dan gathered in shillings, not pence, as in later days, young eyes found a feast of wonder in Napoleon's long ears and

shaggy coat, and never was such music as Dan's organ made.

Dan, too, in those days was good to look upon. A sergeant retired from the regiment that had been stationed in the camp during the gold-rush days, he had the cleanliness that quite absorbed the godliness of the soldier. When he rang his bell in the market-square, where twice a week the stalls were set up and daily the delivery vans ranged in a double line, it glinted in the sun, so polished was it, like the reflected rays from a mirror. He prefaced all announcements with a triple repetition of "Oh yes!" and if attention palled, would introduce an interlude by way of a step-dance, thus making an entertaining break between the several items he had to advertise. Sometimes it was his duty to notify the arrival of a new stock of hessian boots for the men, or of "pork-pie" hats and poplin skirts for the women; or it might be, with an appropriate emblem round his hat, the hour at which the body of Michael Rafferty, deceased, would be borne from its late residence to the cemetery among the gum-trees.

He was straight as the staff of a drum-major, and to the end of his days wore a stock of black silk that gave an unbending dignity to his chin. His professional attire was a long-tailed red cloth coat with brass buttons, white pants, and a straight-brimmed cylindrical top-hat that shone with the suspicion of an occasional application of oil. From the convenient space in this "topper" he would at intervals draw a large many-coloured bandanna handkerchief with which to dry the moisture on his forehead or fleck the dust from his brilliantly polished boots.

The beast was no less well-groomed than the master, and the organ was, in its evidence of care and cleanliness, a fit companion for both. As an instrument it had a decidedly popular taste for tuneful ditties; an arrangement

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the end of the bed was filled in with approximately two yards of a wood-cut depicting the late Duke of Wellington's funeral. Years had mellowed the picture, and flies had speckled the faces of mutes and nobility with radical impartiality.

On another wall hung a framed memorial card of the immortal Nelson; and on a little table in a corner stood the bellman's tool of trade, his big brass bell, placed there at the request of the dying man by the hands of Cherry, and daily polished.

The window of the little room was open, so that the scent of verbena and rosemary could enter, and through it also came the sounds of the outer work-a-day world, with which henceforth he would have nothing in common. The firewood man came down the narrow street, roared, and went on; the sweep hooted his melancholy way past the house; and John Chinaman, dumping his pendulous baskets at the garden gate, offered his vegetables for sale.

Then at the top of the street the Colonel appeared, no longer in uniform, but still trim and debonair, top-hatted, gloved, carrying his malacca cane as if it were a sword.

The scant grey hair with its exact back parting, the drooping yellow-grey moustache, the wrinkled skin of his face told a tale of many years; yet he was as straight as a reed, and walked with the suggestion of a swagger, antedated.

Arriving at the gate he poked the Chinaman's obstructing baskets with an air of "out of the way, rascal!" in his fine handling of the clouded cane. John hastened to depart, leaving Cherry still undecided between cabbage—a vegetable without character, but cheap—and green peas, more appetizing, but making a heavier demand on the housewife's purse.

"Morning, Cherry!" and the Colonel bent his right

THE WILDERNESS

I'd have taken the skin off their backs if they had, egad! Why complain? Bite the bullet and face it. But the world nowadays, Daniel, full of complaints—pitiful, puling, complaining squad! Government puling, diggers puling, everyone puling! No complaints, Sergeant! Some men left yet, eh?"

"No complaints!" repeated Dan, fumbling the unlit cigar.

Again the Colonel filled the room with smoke.

Out of the cloud came the husky voice of Dan, "There's something I'd like to say, sir;" then, with added haste, "not by way of complaint—not for a moment. There's—there's the child, Colonel; there's Cherry. God bless her!" Dan gazed fixedly through the mist of smoke at the funeral car of the great Duke arrested in its progress to the grave. "There's Cherry"—and a pause followed—"and perhaps—per—haps there's Napoleon."

"Certainly Cherry, no doubt Cherry, Sergeant; but—Napoleon—ah! and if not Napoleon, Daniel, if not Napoleon, any complaint, eh?"

"None!" replied the Sergeant, slowly, his voice strained to obedience. "None!" He felt the Colonel's gloved hand rest on his shoulder.

"And if Napoleon, Sergeant, eh?" Dan felt the kindly pressure on his shoulder.

The firewood man was on the homeward track and howled without.

"Oh, dam' that man!" exclaimed the Colonel; and, rising, trotted up and down the space by the bed and shook his stick at the open window.

At last the discordant noise sank to a diminuendo in the distance. The Colonel stood stock-still and looked down at the Sergeant. "I have it, Daniel! Felicia shall adopt the child. She shall! Your child—of course?"

Dan looked up at him inquiringly and repeated, "Of course!"

"Good woman, Felicia," continued the Colonel, looking hard at him. "Very ignorant of this world; and—er—it's not a bad world. Eh?"

"No complaint about it, sir."

"Certainly not; very good world, dam' good world. She's a bit flat in the chest nowadays, and a trifle stiff at the knees—like us, eh!—but a God-fearing, sensible woman! Ah, poor girl, ought to have been a mother thirty years ago, if she hadn't tried to reform every young rake she came across till they all shied off her. There was young Bellamy—dear me, dear me! Good soul, Felicia!—pretty in those days—very pretty—and a good woman—piety of a dozen chaplains. Felicia shall adopt her. And ah! as to Napoleon—well, as to Napoleon—the cursed boys would hang over the fence all day long. Couldn't shoot him, eh? Soldier's death, shooting—eh?"

There was silence on the part of Dan more eloquent than words.

"No, of course not—couldn't shoot him, of course!" The Colonel rubbed his scant locks in perplexity.

"Napoleon and me, we've tramped it together ten years come New Year's day."

"Long-lived animal, the ass!" commented the Colonel, still perplexed between "I would" and "I dare not."

"Cock his ears at the salute when we play 'God save the Queen,' sir. I taught him,"—with a touch of pride.

"Decent in an ass of that name, eh, Daniel?"

"When the great Dook beat Boney he didn't—didn't shoot him, Colonel."

"No, of course not, sir. The great Duke was a gentleman—a gentleman, sir!"

"Yes," assented Dan softly.

Across the Colonel's face, looking down at him, the Sergeant saw the shadow of a smile pass.

"I tell you what, Daniel; I'll adopt him myself, eh? After all," he added, "it's only another ass in the family." The passing smile became a whimsical grin, that served the dual purpose of appreciation of his own little joke and cover to hide the fact that he saw an altogether unsoldierly moisture in the Sergeant's eyes.

"Bless you, Colonel!"

"May hell consume the man!" This was addressed to the returning sweep, who hooted outside the garden gate.

"Go away, you scoundrel! Be off!"

Dan still desired to convey his thanks, but the Colonel made such a bustle, and punctuated his feeble attempt with so many abrupt notes of exclamation, that he had to content himself with a grateful clasp of the hand held out to him.

"Good-bye, Sergeant! See you to-morrow! Stand easy, Daniel, stand easy! Er! when—er—when another voice, another voice calls 'tention—not mine, Daniel—not mine—there will be no complaints, eh?"

"None, sir, none!" And he knew from the glow in the old soldier's eyes there would be none.

"Good-bye!" The "dam' flies" worried the Colonel's pink-rimmed eyes as he bustled out of the room. In the porch he met Cherry and again stooped to kiss her; then for a moment held her chin in his hand and looked tenderly in her face.

"You love him, eh?"

"Oh, Colonel!"

"Of course, of course. Love the old Colonel too—eh, eh?"

She looked up and he knew that she understood him,

and saw beneath the little armour of rough points and affectations that shut in his kind old heart.

"Be a good girl, my child. God bless you!" And he was halfway up the street before she realized that he had gone.

That night Daniel answered the Great Commander's order—and without complaint.

CHAPTER II

WITH the exception of the basement and the private office of the principal, where lights still burned, the warehouse of Rockleigh, Merton and Company, of Sydney, was in darkness this night of July, eighteen hundred and seventy-two.

The private office, situated on the ground floor, was approached through the glass-panelled doors that opened off the vestibule, reached by a flight of stone steps from the street. A broad gangway through the Manchester Department led to the counting-house. The goods themselves were at night-time shrouded in great sheets. The counting-house occupied a section of the floor, and was cut off from the warehouse proper by a partition of polished cedar and glass. At one end of it was the public office of the head of the house, with a raised floor, on which stood a writing-table and chair. It was so situated that from it the head could, through a glassed partition, overlook the rows of desks at which the clerks worked on their ledgers and correspondence. From this office a door opened into a smaller apartment, the private office, where special interviews were granted or important customers received.

To-night Hugh Merton—who was also Rockleigh and Company—stayed late, so late that even the very junior clerk, who made it a principle to also stay late when the head saw fit to do so, on the speculation of thus drawing favourable attention to his diligence, had turned

out the light above his desk, coughed discreetly, and departed.

They were left to themselves, Merton and his visitor, isolated in the gloom of the warehouse, whose atmosphere was pregnant with the stuffy odour of soft goods.

The visitor sat at a table opposite Merton. He was young, keen-eyed, clean-shaven. His cheeks were flushed, and the nervous movements of his face indicated an ill-concealed excitement under which he laboured. His dark hair was cropped short, and on either side of the forehead were twin patches where the hand of the student, poring over books and diagrams, had worn a passage-way. Slim of figure, almost boyish, nervous (you could notice it not only in the mobile face, but in the restless fingers, the shifting body), he was in contrast to the big-framed, full-faced, phlegmatic man opposite to him. The latter bore a suggestion of sensuality in lips and chin, of strength in the set of the jaws, of capacity in the breadth of his forehead and deep-set eyes.

The visitor had walked hither heedless of the rain, and of the hurrying foot-passengers, whom he jostled in his reckless haste to be face to face with this man who had compassed the ruin of his people. In a squalid room, on a squalid bed, his mother, the last of his kin, lay dead. The tender-hearted soul! Her letters in their delicate angular handwriting were treasured in his trunk, still aboard the vessel that had brought him home to her. Surely never had there been a more bitter home-coming! What a wonderful, motherly pack of lies her letters had been!

"We are getting on capitally, dear, and have everything we need, Alice and I. Two home-keeping women do not want much, and you need never trouble about us, dear, never. Do not send us any more money; we do not need it, really. A medical man has to keep up his position, and you must not skimp yourself for us."

It was always the same story—"We are well and have enough." Even in his arms when dying she held the truth from him. "We did not need much, dear—truly—truly. We could get along on very little. It was different with us—quite different from you." And now that her pinched, tired body lay at rest, he knew what the struggle had been. Alice had died in the hospital alone, three weeks before he landed. "She had changed a little since your father died—of course we all change. Yes! she was thin, a little thin. Her hair? yes, it was getting grey—just a little grey. No, dear, I'm not crying, not about that I mean, for—for she is very happy now." Still not the truth, for indeed she was crying about it, as the memory of it all came back to her: the worn-out body, the blank life of her daughter. She remembered the babe at her breast, the merry childish laughter, all the hopes, all the castles in the air! It was wicked to complain, of course it was wicked; but if God had only spared her a little! Alice was not strong—not strong enough for all she had to bear. Then she remembered the long days of unceasing work, the joyless hours spent in the room they called "home." At first Alice had rebelled—women were getting so different—rebelled because she said it wasn't fair, it wasn't just. Every penny went to Jack. Surely some of it, some of the little inheritance might go to brighten their lives as well—her mother's and her own! Life was so grey for them—and she was young. It was always Jack's medical course, his books, his lectures, his expenses. But in the end, as the mother in her tears remembered, she, the elder, the stronger of will, had conquered; and the fragments of the dead father's estate, to the uttermost penny, went across the sea to Edinburgh, and life clouded over for the two lonely women; its sunshine ceased to warm them. So Alice moved in the daily round of her task—just a shop-girl with only Sunday and its rest

in the dull room to look forward to. She knew the spiritless resignation of the hewer of wood, the drawer of water. Well—she was happy now, so mother said!

The rest of the story he filled in for himself. His medical course at an end, he had taken a berth as ship's doctor, had seen the world, at little expense truly, but also with little remuneration for such skill as he was called upon to exercise. He left the ship at China and remained there, gaining hospital experience for some years. The little store of money left by his father, the jetsam from the wreck of a fortune, had been eaten up by the time he graduated. He remembered the little sums that thereafter for a while and at varying intervals came to him. They were drops of the two women's life-blood. He knew it now. It was later, in China, that he bethought himself of them and sent them occasional gifts. Her letters—for his mother wrote for both, afraid lest Alice should let slip some inkling of the truth—kept his mind at rest. Now he called himself "fool!" that he had never read between the lines; but the love of the mother made her skilful in deceit. Australia was a long way off, and distance dulls the edge of sympathy. "It was all right!" an everyday philosophy that dodges worry. He fully persuaded himself with many an argument that indeed it was all right; his father had died since he left home—surely he had saved something for them out of the wreck. Often on the home-coming voyage, when he took his after-dinner smoke, and resting his arms on the bulwarks looked out over the unbroken space of water, he dreamt of the meeting. He pictured their home, a cottage with a rare garden of flowers—"mother" loved to potter among the plants; Alice, a woman, pretty, bright-faced—Alice with the rippling hair. What a meeting it would be! Mother a little greyer, a little altered by time, but still mother with the love-light in her eyes.

Happily he never knew that once, or more than once, the younger woman, in the bitterness of death to her youth, had threatened to write to him and tell him the truth; but the mother humbled herself and prayed to her so piteously not to do this thing that she put aside the intention, and so the lie remained the seeming truth.

Now that she was dead he hastened to face the man who had compassed the ruin of his father's fortunes, who had callously let his mother and his sister sink to abject poverty and death unheeded.

He sat before him face to face. The opportunity had come, but the white-heat of passion was chilled, his rage but ashes. On his way, absorbed in thoughts of what he had left, the life and history of mother and daughter had taken the proportions of a tragedy—a play in life wrought out with tears and agony, but in the impassive presence of its author it sank to the plane of the commonplace. His youthful emotion, with its over-wrought conception of eternal justice, spluttered out like a farthing dip in a draught of air before the bloodless cynicism of this man of affairs, who judged humanity by a scale of weights and measures rendered into cash equivalents.

"Ten years ago, Mr. Merton," he began in a quiet expressionless voice, "my father sat where you sit. You were only working your way up then—slowly, Mr. Merton, but very surely."

Merton assented with a nod, an amused expression on his face.

"You had done very well in the House, for a lad"—he hesitated, as if seeking some descriptive term sufficiently opprobrious—"a lad my father picked out of the gutter!"

Merton again good humouredly assented, "Yes; the fact is not locally accurate, but it is near enough for argument."

"From first to last he befriended you—and yours. Your mother had her last days made happy by his generosity. Mine is lying dead to-night, and her death is at your door as surely as if you had killed her with your hands."

"Do you expect me to listen—to waste my time listening to your boyish sentiment, Dr. Rockleigh?"

"You forget we are alone, so utterly alone that even if you attempted it you could not escape me."

"What do you mean?"

"You sneered at my youth; well, youth has some points. It has this one at least, I am your master here, alone."

"Oh, I see! you propose to take the advantage of your years in physical strength, eh? That's the sort of honour one associates with thieves."

The unfortunate phrase gave Rockleigh an opening he was quick to seize.

"Yes, when—one happens to associate with thieves."

The older man, stung by the words caught from his lips and flung at him, rose impatiently from his chair.

"You—you damned cub!"

"Sit down, Mr. Merton, sit down! I'm not here to play to-night. I'm here to do what you can understand, business."

There was something in the alert, expectant attitude of the younger man, as he sat there crouching, as it were, that cooled the rebellious blood of his senior. So he sat again, and with a shrug of the shoulders assumed with poor art a nonchalance he did not feel.

"One would think, Dr. Rockleigh, that an audience, listening to your performance under compulsion, would scarcely appeal to a young man of such spirit. May I be permitted to rest on the couch? Ah, thanks!" and he stretched himself on the couch that stood by the wall. "Will you accept a cigar? No! You do not object to my

smoking, I hope? Thanks! Now, if the light were lowered; it glares so in one's face and I've had a busy day, Doctor. Ah, thanks! Oh, you need not have put it out altogether."

"It doesn't matter. You can't escape me to-night."

"Dear me! I had no such thought with a young man of such parts. Well, what is it?"

Rockleigh rested against the edge of the table, gripping it with his muscular hands.

"I said you made your way in the House."

"You were so kind as to say something of the sort!"

"My father was as good a man as God ever made. He made no better. Indeed, he was too good for traffic with men of your kind. He gave you all his confidence."

"He was very confiding, your poor dear father, very."

"You gained such influence over him—Heaven knows by what subtle, devilish means—that in the end he became your dependent, not you his. You had acquired a reputation for financial acumen of a kind. On your advice he went into this and that speculation; thus cunningly diverting his attention from the House, from the only business he knew anything about. You would leave our table—breaking bread with us had no sort of obligation to you, Merton—and go with my father to his den to cozen him, cajole him, cheat him. You had—you traitorous dog!—you had the brazen impudence to try and win my sister from us, a shammed affection to bring us closer in your coil, and then when the traps you led my father into snapped on him one after the other, you found a temporary way out of the difficulty through my mother's affection. Next her settlement went, and all that remained was my father's encumbered interest in the House, encumbered by usurious interest and

ruinous conditions to you. Then the day came when you finally ate us up, picked us clean to the bone. A few hundred pounds, enough to carry me through my course, was all that remained."

"Oh, you took the final snap?"

"God help me, I did! I knew nothing of all this story—this later business, till I returned a few days ago."

"So then, to quote your own words, Doctor, their death lies at your door. Yours, not mine."

"You lie, Merton! You murdered my father, sister, mother—not in any way the hangman can reach, your cur's soul is too flabby for that; but not the less truly you murdered them."

"Your courtesy to one who cannot hit back is quite excessive. If I were your equal in years, in strength, you would not dare——"

"Dare? You can cheat, sneak, crawl, but hit back, face to face, as a man hits back—you?—you hit back? You never did, you never could—you lily-livered hound."

"How much more of this insolence am I to endure?"

"How many years of drawn-out agony did these two women endure? Answer that!"

"You have surely exhausted the vocabulary of a very liberal education—at your mother's expense, by the way. Is there to be no defence?"

"Defence? What defence is there?"

"Before the tribunal of youth, trial is conducted by accusation solely."

"What defence have you?"

"Nothing very elaborate; nothing very technical. Simply this. There is not an act of mine towards your father you can put your finger on, and say, 'This thing the law forbids.' There's not one transaction in our lives that the ordinary rules of traffic between man and man do not sanction."

"Is that the beginning and the end of your moral code? 'The law allows it, the court awards it'—to Shylock!"

"Rockleigh! Rockleigh! can't you see the absurdity of this very juvenile lead in melodrama you are playing?"

"There is no melodrama about my dead mother, my dead sister, my—my dear old dad. You damned them, killed them."

"I? Why do you put all the sins of society on my shoulders? You fancy there is a direct chain of consequences between their deaths and my acts. There is not; but even if there were, what a fine distinction! In your quixotic scheme, half society is the murderer of the other half. Only here and there the sequence of events is traceable; but when you have such a sequence, or think you have, you take one man in the line and dub him 'murderer' because your dead father is the frayed-out end of it. One would think a medical student who has the scientific attitude of mind would sicken at such fustian. I thought your cult preached the doctrine of the fit from the high places of your schools. Yet you come here like a romantic girl, with a sweet assortment of pretty aphorisms of the 'brethren live together in unity' order, to teach me—I who have learned my lessons in life itself, I who know the game through and through—to teach me a little morality."

"You'd have to learn the meaning of the word first, Merton."

"Learn its meaning? It seems to me I'm to be the teacher, not the pupil. I won't pick phrases with you; why should I? This is what morality means, Rockleigh—it is to life what manners are at dinner. We live on one another, we eat one another, and pick the bones of the slaughtered. The difference between us and the vultures is a matter of good manners, morality. It's just the difference between

the bird with fouled beak and the man on top with a service of fine china and a spotless serviette."

"You think life worth an hour's purchase, and believe that?"

"If it were not for what you call 'that,' life wouldn't be worth the having. If it were not for the animal lust for fight that is in us I, for one, wouldn't call it worth the having, Rockleigh."

"Yet you are a craven at heart, Merton. I know your sort of man. Fine brave braggarts, as full of bluff and bully as an egg of meat, and some day you lie on a hospital bed and your little dickey-bird soul cries 'tweak! tweak!' with fear!"

"I'm not babbling of physical courage; you buy that for one and a penny a day, or whatever you pay Tommy Atkins. I mean the everyday fight in life, the fight we get our money by."

"The particularly bloodless and particularly dirty fight."

"I don't care a curse what you call it. It's the salt of life, and I'll say this, Rockleigh, if I had a dozen dull fools like your father in my hands, I'd play them. That's my business, as it is every man's business—to play the game. Your father had the same chance as I, indeed a better chance, because he was in the run of learning the moves many a year before I mastered the A, B, C of the business. Ah, but I was keen! It just braces one up to think of it. The delight of laying out your snares, catching your birds! Why didn't he try to catch me? It's all in the game. It was as open to him as to me."

"If I told you why—because he was a gentleman—you wouldn't understand it, Merton."

"There's no more priggish word than 'gentleman.'"

"It depends on how you use it."

"Well, I know nothing about your fine distinctions.

What I do know is this—your father hadn't the grit in him for a fight on the market. Afraid of dirtying his hands! The wonder to me—my bit of solid good luck—was that he hadn't been plucked featherless years before. Perhaps it was a sort of dispensation that such an elderly financial chicken should be reserved to give me a start in life."

"You tell me seriously that this is your view of life, of 'the game,' as you call it?"

"Seriously? It is the only view—the only possible one—as you will learn with every year you live. If you don't, they'll make you pay."

"Who will?"

"The world, my young friend, the world; our dearly beloved brethren and sisters. Oh, it's a merry, merry world when you're top-dog, my young medico; but for the underdog there isn't much in it. The moral is very plain: keep on top every hour, every minute you can!"

"You have a son, Merton. Do you teach him this hellish sort of stuff?"

"Do I love him? He is the only child I have, Rockleigh. Do I love him? Love him, and not sharpen every fang, train every muscle to let him keep the place I'll give him? Do you think me a fool? Why, man, young as he is he takes to the lesson like a duck to water. It's in the little chap's blood."

"By the father's side."

"Yes, by the father's side. Rockleigh, you'd better keep to the father's side. I've stood more from you to-night than I ever stood from mortal man in my life; but"—and he swore by his Maker—"if you say a word against the boy's mother, I'll beat your face in, or you'll kill me."

"I knew his mother—knew her when I was a boy. She was a good woman, so good that life with you must indeed have been an inferno for her."

"Let her name drop! Now, will you go?"

"No; not till we understand each other finally."

"Well, what more?"

"Just this. Once you had my father in your hands. You snared him—that was the expression, I think. You may not always be top-dog—again your own simile—not always, Merton. Some day perhaps you may—odd things happen even to top-dogs—you may fall into my hands. If you do, may the Lord have mercy on you! For once in my life I will play your own game—your dirty game—for it will have no trace of mercy in it."

He struck a match and turned towards the door. As he passed through it he glanced back in the dim light. "Some day, Merton!"

CHAPTER III

IT was Sunday evening in Golden City. The church-bells had ceased their competitive jangling, sadly out of tune. Such folk as had failed to answer their call were gathered indoors, for the city was at an altitude where winter evenings made the fireside welcome.

The Misses Felicia and Tod Hilliard, who in the census return accurately described their condition to be that of spinsters, and admitted ages on the ascending side of forty, resided in a comfortable cottage or bungalow on the outskirts of the city. From its broad verandah beyond the high edges enclosing the grounds glimpses could be caught of the roofs of other and similar cottages.

The ladies, being in what was described as "comfortable circumstances," kept the ample lawns and garden that surrounded the house in the trim perfection characteristic of spinsterhood. The interior of the home was the sanctuary of order and cleanliness.

To the visiting Philistine, whose daily way led through less well-ordered places, the highly-polished beeswax floors gave less security of tenure than the local laws relating to the taking up of mining leases.

The furnishing of the rooms suggested a grudging displacement of old-time solidity by modern fragility. Old mahogany seemed to glower darkly through its polish at frivolous-looking gipsy-tables with spindle legs.

The principal apartment was the dining-room, equal in

size to any two other rooms in the house. It was papered in a brown monotone unrelieved by pattern. The wall space above a massive sideboard was, for the greater part, taken up by a full-length portrait in oils of "Our brother the Colonel," who had now departed this life three years. He was represented at a great expenditure of colour, in full regimentals, standing at the side of a table, one hand on a partially unrolled scroll, the other on his sword-hilt. His neck was held in a rigidly fixed military stock. The artist had given him a truly martial front, an eye to threaten and command. As a matter of fact it conveyed but the faintest impression of what the Colonel had been at any stage of his career, but it was a great work of the old formal school. The background of the picture was filled in by a Greek column and a most obviously "arranged" curtain, looped back to show a distant prospect of palms and minarets. This prospect, you were told, depicted Delhi, for it had been in the service of the East India Company that "our brother" had spent the best years of his life, in the days when the value of the rupee was not a speculative quantity, Beneath the picture hung his sword, a knot of crape on the hilt. The opposite wall was broken by a window looking upon a garden that in the coming springtime would blossom into masses of glorious roses, Gloire de Dijon, Cloth of Gold, and many others whose names and ways were known with minute accuracy by Auntie Tod. In this same garden she spent long days of spring and summer, her big sun-bonnet bobbing up and down among the bushes as she forked a little here, removed a little deadwood there, carrying out the art and craft of the gardener.

To-night, however, thick curtains were drawn across the window, shutting out the garden as it lay in the sleep of winter.

On the dining-room table stood two old-fashioned silver

candlesticks bearing lighted candles. Midway between them stood the snuffers, heavy silver scissors with a little box attachment. They rested on a tray richly chased, a beautiful bit of old-time art work.

Of course snuffers were quite out of date, and wax candles had come to be associated almost exclusively with religious ceremonial. Gas had replaced candle and lamp, but the aunts preferred candlelight; and as the snuffers had been put in the same place for over twenty years, time ceased to run so far as they were concerned.

The dubious illumination furnished by the candles left the greater part of the room in obscurity, but the semicircle round the fireplace was ruddy and warm with the light and heat of the log fire that burned on the open hearth. When a point of flame shot up from the falling wood it glinted on the Colonel's red coat, and sent arrows glancing from the polished surface of the furniture.

At one side of the fireplace sat Aunt Felicia, the elder of the sisters, cozy in the warm comfort of the fire; her long-fingered hands in their silk-knitted mittens folded on the lap of her Sunday dress. The silk of this dress was so stiff and of such quality that in its high-born pride it would almost stand of itself. On her head was an elaborately goffered cap—she goffered all her caps on a quaint-looking tool that might be described as a metal note of interrogation with its tail set in a pedestal. The grave-looking face of the old lady was ovalled, but with indentations on the oval where once there had been plump rounded cheeks; the lips, though thin, still showed the traces of a curve; steady grey eyes looked through the round glasses of the solidly-mounted spectacles that sat rigidly on the well-defined bridge of the Hilliard nose. The Colonel had had the nose, his brother, the Dean, had the nose, the true paternal Hilliard nose; but poor Auntie

Tod had only her mother's nose—a tip-tilted, unconsequential thing—a thing that fulfilled its appointed function, but had no title of claim to social distinction. The absence of the distinctive feature perhaps accounted for the condition of pupilage in which Auntie Tod still stood towards her elder sister. In moments of abstraction Miss Felicia had been known to address her as "Tod, my child."

Aunt Tod was round-faced, plump of figure, and altogether suggestive of good cheer and motherliness—gone spinster-wise in the perversity of things.

Poor Auntie Tod! how the little ones—and she had a host of baby friends—loved her! how it went to her heart to send them packing home at nightfall with their pinnies full of flowers, and to turn from the "Good-night, Auntie! good-night!" at the garden gate into the silent spaces of the childless home!

To-night Auntie Tod was at church. At the other side of the fireplace, opposite Miss Felicia, seated so that the candlelight would fall on the page of the volume she was reading, sat a girl of twenty, plainly dressed in some grey stuff, its monotony relieved by a white frill round the neck. Her abundant gold-brown hair glistened in the flickering light of the fire, as if it too shared the universal polish of the house. Her face was not beautiful; women would have called it plain; men would not have thought it so.

This was Cherry Maywood, Daniel having died eight years before. Napoleon also had passed away to the Elysian fields, or such other bourne from which travellers of his kind do not return.

Cherry's position in the household was hard to define. She was something less than daughter and more than maid. At the command of "our brother the Colonel"—for the greater part of his intercourse with his fellow-beings was by way of command—she had been adopted by Aunt Felicia,

with Aunt Tod as an accessory after the fact. A slender annuity from the Colonel, for the continuance of which due provision had been made in his will, sufficed to clothe her and provide the little else she needed.

Sunday reading in the house of Hilliard was confined to certain godly books drawn from the shelves of a bookcase filled for the greater part with works on gunnery, tactics, and the art of war generally. The collection of godly books might have been likened to a theological medicine chest. If the troubles of the world beset one, Baxter's "Saints' Rest" might be recommended as a sovereign specific, the "Pilgrim's Progress" might be likened to a spiritual tonic, and Foxe's "Book of Martyrs" to a powerful stimulant.

The previous year demure Cherry, of the glistening hair and rounded chin, had plodded valiantly through Hervey's "Meditations among the Tombs"—an early edition, its quaint long s's giving the printed pages a sort of typographical lisp.

This winter they were well into a volume of sermons by the learned Jeremy Taylor, the divine who preached erudite discourses to the unfortunate Charles, who later walked out of Whitehall to lose his head on the scaffold.

Cherry gave a little undertoned sigh as she read: "Plenty and pleasure are not the proper instruments of felicity—because felicity is not a jewel that can be locked up in one man's cabinet. He that cannot be satisfied with common provision hath a bigger need than he that can; it is harder and more contingent and more difficult and more troublesome for him to be satisfied." Here the learned Jeremy lapsed into Greek. It was skipped with the brief comment "Greek!" Maybe it conveyed as little to the royal patron, meditating on something new in buckles and feathers, as it did to Cherry.

"Said Epicurus," proceeded the reader, making a break to ask "Who was Epicurus, Aunt Felicia?"

Miss Felicia ran through Magnall's "Questions" with her mental eye, but saw no answer to the inquiry in that comprehensive work, so replied—drawing a bow at a venture—"A Greek, my dear! a learned man or the good doctor would not refer to him."

"Oh!" exclaimed Cherry vaguely, and proceeded with monotonous intonation: "said Epicurus, 'I feed sweetly upon bread and water, those sweet and easy provisions of the body, and I defy the pleasures of costly provisions,' and the man was so confident that he had the advantage over wealthy tables that he thought himself happy as the immortal gods.' More Greek, auntie."

"That will do, dear, for to-night." She sat prim and old-fashioned, with an air of the blackboard and the injunction to turn out one's toes in her precise attitude, gazing meditatively into the fire.

"There is a good deal in what the Greek gentleman says, Cherry. We are happiest when we live simply. We were all happier, I think, in the old days—when life was a very simple affair." Then, after a pause: "I remember quite well the morning we landed from the ship. It was a long wearisome journey by sail in those days. We lay for weeks in the tropics waiting a wind. There might as well be no tropics nowadays, the way they dash through them. Our brother the Colonel was stationed here with the regiment, for it was after the trouble with the diggers, and they made a permanent soldiers' camp here. We drove to the diggings in a dog-cart tandem—it was very good style in those days, my dear, and we were young, Cherry; and—Oh dear me!—it was so—so——"

"Jolly!" suggested Cherry.

"Well, dear, that is not exactly the word, but it may do.

Sister Tod and I, to avoid embarrassing Lieutenant Golightly who drove us, shared the front and back seat alternately. Our brother, the Dean—though he was then not yet Dean—had to remain and report himself to the Bishop. The weather was perfect, and the road—though it was only a rough track, you know—was crowded like an Indian highway. My dear, you would have thought the world and his wife were going to the diggings. I remember—and sister Tod would bear me out—seeing four dogs on the road harnessed to a little cart filled with pots and pans. Bullock-dray after bullock-dray, carts of all kinds, and men of every nation on horse and foot. When we reached the top of a hill we could see the line of men, horses and drays wriggling like a great snake up and down, in and out, through the scattered timber. All going to the diggings to pick up nuggets by the hatful, of course! The creeks were choked with the drays bogged in them. Men like ants crossed by trees that had been felled to make a bridge. Such a cracking of whips! such a hurly-burly! At night the teams camped by the roadside. There were blazing log fires with groups of men gathered round them. I remember one camp of young Germans where they had an accordion and a saxhorn to lead them in singing their volkslieder. Often now, when I shut my eyes, the music comes back to me quite distinctly. I had heard much music both on the harp and the piano in my girlhood, but I remember the music on that one night, rising up among the gum trees into the clear fresh starlight, as I remember no other music. Of course all the camp songs were not like that—dear no!—but for the most part they were bright and cheery, and not—not very wicked. Dear me! there was such hope and cheer everywhere. We shall never see days like those again, Cherry. Then the waking in the crisp morning air with the tinkle of the bullock bells in our ears! After breakfast

—and what appetites we had!—we 'got under way,' as the Lieutenant expressed it. Here and there we came across a patch of buttercups, reminding us of English meadows. I remember we insisted on Lieutenant Golightly stopping for half an hour whilst we gathered big bunches, the dew still on their glazed faces. But perhaps the memory most distinct of all is that of the first glimpse we had of the goldfields. It was after sunset, but we drove on in the moonlight along the range of hills till the broad dusty track dipped down. There in the gully below us spread the diggers' tents like great clusters of mushrooms—white patches scattered along the banks of the creek—lights twinkling here and there, or gleaming dully through the canvas walls. And the dogs! Oh, my dear, all the dogs of the world gathered together and barking at once! Then in the morning—you will never see such a sight in your life, child—the diggers thick as bees round a comb of honey, all along the yellow creek, with the rock, rock of the cradles, as they washed out the alluvial for gold."

"Striving hard, very hard, to make money, auntie, and get well away from the simple life?"

"Yes, dear, I suppose so. It is the misfortune of things that one never realizes when one really is happy. Some sunny day free from care, some little passing pleasure that we take like children, and we reach the happiest hour in our lives—but we do not know it. We are always expecting happiness in the big things of life; but that's all a mistake, Cherry. The Greek gentleman wasn't far away from the truth, believe me."

"The bread-and-water theory?" and Cherry laughed a little doubtful laugh.

"You must allow a margin for philosophy, Cherry. All philosophers—and they say some women—exaggerate."

"Then extremes do meet sometimes, auntie?"

The dining-room door was opened to admit Aunt Tod returning from church, red-nosed, bright-eyed, bringing with her a bracing touch of the cold outer air. She was accompanied by a middle-aged man and a youth. The elder was Mr. William Barlow, familiarly known as "Billy," attorney, solicitor, and conveyancer, to whom Geoffrey, the younger man, nephew of the aunts and the only son of Merton, of Rockleigh, Merton and Company, was bound in articles.

"Billy," a well-known figure on the goldfield, had been professionally associated with a greater number of "jumping" cases than probably any other solicitor in the place. "Jumping" was the name for a kind of legal gymnastic by which the alleged mining right of one digger was appropriated by another equally worthy and wideawake resident, under cover of an alleged flaw in title. Whichever side won, "Billy" invariably profited, and had done so to such a generous tune that he was now rich in landed estate and bank deposits. The subtle art of making up a bill of costs, the intricacies of conflicting title, the loopholes in Mining Board Regulations, and the precedents of the Court of Mines were at his finger ends. But decorous though the path of mining litigation was in those days, no one had ever questioned Billy's personal probity. He was a bachelor, not it was thought through misfortune, but by conviction.

During the Colonel's lifetime he and Billy, in company with certain creature comforts, had invariably spent in the camp at least a couple of evenings a week at cribbage. On his old friend's death the solicitor became the sole trustee of the Colonel's estate, and the guardian of Cherry, between whom and the aunts such little fortune as he left was shared.

"Ah, Cherry! Give me a kiss, child. That's one advantage of my condition, that I may kiss all round without

prejudice, eh? Now I couldn't do that if I were married, could I, Miss Felicia?"

"Oh, of course you could," replied Miss Felicia, dryly; "but its wisdom might be doubtful. Well, Tod, my child, what was the sermon about?"

Poor Aunt Tod blushed painfully; she had forgotten the text—she never could remember texts.

Barlow, who sympathized, came to her rescue. "Sermon! of course, yes, a very excellent discourse, Miss Felicia."

"What was the subject, Mr. Barlow?"

"Ah, yes, of course!" replied Barlow, apprehensively, with a rapid glance at Miss Tod. "Well—er—there were several subjects—several heads, you know."

"Dealing with what?"

"Ah, yes, of course, as you say, they all dealt with it."

"With what, Mr. Barlow?"

"Sin," said Barlow, largely. "Sin!"

"Any particular manifestation of it?"

"Oh no, just the ordinary case." He referred to it as if it were a kind of fever or contagious disease.

Miss Felicia had pity on him and turned the conversation. "How is Geoffrey getting on, Mr. Barlow?"

"The diligent apprentice is not in the same field with him," answered Barlow, with unblushing assurance. You could take this in two meanings. Aunt Felicia took it in one, and Geoffrey, being present and having an inner knowledge, took it in another.

"Mr. Barlow," queried Cherry, when Auntie Tod, having removed her hat and outdoor garments, had returned and they were all seated round the fire, "who"—and she looked demurely at Aunt Felicia—"who was Epicurus?"

"Never met him; never even heard of him," replied

Barlow, with frank candour. "New sort of a quack, I suppose."

"Well, this is his prescription," consulting the book of ancient sermons: "To feed sweetly on bread and water, and defy the pleasures of costly provisions."

"Hum! sounds like a proverb that has lost its way in a dietary scale. Ask Geoffrey!"

Geoffrey, a handsome lad with a fine air of assured belief in himself, answered laconically, "Rubbish!"

Aunt Felicia looked at him reprovingly.

"Well, if you want to know, Aunt Felicia," replied her nephew, squaring his shoulders, and perhaps unwittingly putting a touch of aggressiveness into his voice, "my belief is this: all that sort of talk about it being more blessed to give than to receive, and 'feeding sweetly on bread and water,' as Cherry read, is drivel, and nothing but drivel. What stuff and nonsense! You put a plate of roast beef and baked potatoes before your friend—what's his name?"

"Epicurus."

"Well, put the beef and a jug of beer before him on one side, and the bread and water on the other, and see which he'll feed sweetly on. I wouldn't give a brass farthing if it were not for the fight and the good things on top. That's the real game of life, auntie. Dad's played it, and dad's done well; and I'm going to play it too for all I'm worth. I dare say Epicurus wrote that for the other chap. That sort of thing generally is for the other chap. For myself, I'm going to get all I can,—all I can lay my hands on. That's straight!"

"Geoffrey is going to be what you might call 'a Jumper' *sans merci*, Miss Hilliard," commented Barlow, who noticed an unpleasant contraction of the muscles of that lady's mouth, ominous of hard words to follow. "After all, you know, it wouldn't do for us to sit down to bread

and water and let other men bag the turkey and champagne."

"Nevertheless," insisted Aunt Felicia, "I do think there was something in what the Greek gentleman said. 'Feeding sweetly on bread and water' does sound a little weak, I admit, and perhaps it would be better if poets and philosophers kept strictly to prose—that is, of course, I mean——"

"Precisely, Miss Hilliard; I am with you altogether," assented Barlow, with a wicked twinkle in his little black eyes. "Poetry covers a multitude of mental obscurities."

But here the argument was interrupted by Bridget, the faithful Irish "general," who appeared with the supper tray, and coincidentally the Rev. Jeremy Taylor and all his works were set aside.

Supper finished, Geoffrey said good-night and departed, but Barlow remained to smoke a cigar. The smoking of this cigar was an institution. As a matter of fact Miss Felicia did not approve of tobacco smoking, but she frankly recognized it as one of the minor sins of society one must needs tolerate. "Our brother the Colonel" had been an inveterate smoker, and his friends had shared his vice. Miss Hilliard therefore sacrificed her personal feelings so far as to even keep a box of cigars on the dining-room sideboard. Barlow, equally a slave to convention, smoked them, even praised them, and inwardly prayed that some day fortune would deliver into his hands the tradesman who had sold them to the confiding lady.

It was over this weed of Germany that Miss Hilliard sought weekly advice from the trustee of their little fortune. They sat before the fire, Barlow in a capacious easy chair, Aunt Felicia opposite to him in a straight-backed piece of furniture, severe and angular in design; her black silk skirts drawn up a discreet inch or two, so that the warmth from

the smouldering logs might be gratefully diffused about her maiden ankles.

"Do you know, Mr. William"—this was a familiar shortening of the full title, expressing an intimacy of friendship but one removed from the blood relation. "Do you know"—and here Barlow inclined his ear in respectful expectancy, though inwardly maligning the German and all his ways in counterfeiting honest tobacco—"I am much concerned about poor Hetty's boy."

Henrietta Hilliard had been the youngest daughter of the family, joining her elder sisters some years after they had settled on the diggings. Subsequently she married Hugh Merton, spent with him a few years of not too sympathetic married life, and died in giving birth to Geoffrey.

"Indeed!" commented Barlow, removing the cigar from his lips, in blessed surcease, and gazing pensively at the dirty-grey ash. "Indeed!"

"Young men in my day," she continued, "were, if anything, rather too quixotic. Youth was over-generous, over-confiding."

"Ah, yes!" assented Barlow, with a sympathetic sigh. "Youth was confiding in those days, and our uncles, with the heraldic sign of three brass spheres on a field of green, were—well, accommodating."

"Yes, they had their debts and their follies, no doubt, Mr. William, the lads of our day. The poor dear Colonel was never quite free of—what do you call it?"

"Paper, my dear lady, paper! Some guide of youth has likened life to a sheet of blank paper. The dear old Colonel filled his up largely with a familiar trinity of vowels, 'I.O.U.'"

"The Colonel had a very high sense of honour as a boy. He was rarely without a black eye, a cut lip, or

something the matter with his nose. Mother used to say that beefsteak for Percival was a regular item in the butcher's account. Father said he fought on general principles; at all events, he seemed to be always at it. He was a good lad though, Mr. William, clean-souled and full of boyish ideas of glory and greatness. Aunt Tod and I—for Hetty was not yet born—were, I think, to have lived in palaces, one or more each. Poor dear Percival! We saw the outside of Buckingham Palace once; we never got nearer. The dear lad! But your cigar is out, Mr. William!"

"Dear me, I'm getting more absent-minded every day. So it is."

"Throw it away and take another. They ought to be nice. The tobacconist declared they were quite new. He tried to palm off some of his old stock at first; tradesmen also are not what they used to be, Mr. William."

"I think I'll light it again, Miss Felica. Some cigars are none the worse for being relit."

"I'm glad you find them so good," she remarked with an obvious air of gratification. "Geoffrey isn't like that, you know."

"Like what?"

"Like what I was speaking about—the Colonel when he was a boy."

"Oh, isn't he?"

Miss Felicia shook her head decisively and pursed her lips.

"No. His father placed him with us after Hetty's death; but of course you know that. What was I saying? Oh, I remember! Even when only a little fellow he would come home with his pockets filled with marbles—other boys'."

"Well, the legitimate gains of skill, I suppose?"

Again Miss Felicia pursed her lips and shook her head till the goffered frills were agitated violently.

"No, Mr. William; I found out all about it. He had a piece of wood with little arches cut in it. I understood from the young bankrupt who explained it to me, that you paid an alley for a shot, and if you went—that is, your alley went—through an arch marked, say five then you got five alleys; but if you didn't go through any arch—and that seemed to be the general practice—then Geoffrey kept the alley. Later on he did some sort of traffic in pocket-knives. Finally"—and here she sighed deeply—"I found he was loaning out shillings on what the young bankrupt described as 'easy terms till you tried them.' I believe it was this way: you received ninepence out of your shilling, and paid back the shilling in full with threepence interest at the end of the week."

Barlow lay back in his chair, and laughed long and heartily.

"Took to business from the start, egad!"

"I didn't like it, Mr. William; I didn't like it at all."

"Well, well, Miss Hilliard, of course it wasn't quite boyish—quite, er, quite healthy, in our old-fashioned sense, you know. But, God bless us, the world's changing! A few more years, and youth will be discarded with the feeding-bottle."

"Your cigar is out again. Please throw it away and have another."

William Barlow beneath his breath cursed all foreign industries, but replied smilingly—

"I really think I will. They are so good!" and took another as an act of penance.

"And the way he talks now," she continued, "so heartlessly, so ungenerously! Don't you think so? It seems

such a pity for him to think so meanly of life—of us all, just as he is on the threshold."

"You like youth to have its illusions, Miss Felicia?"

"You mean faith in God, in His goodness; and, in a lesser way, in our goodness, our own goodness, imperfect though it may be?" questioned the old lady with something of diffidence."

"Yes, perhaps, yes!" Barlow felt uncertain of his ground.

"Why do people call faith in the goodness of life illusion?" she said slowly, looking into the fire as though she might still find castles there. "Isn't the later belief that there is no goodness in life at all, none under the sun, just as much an illusion?"

"All extremes are illusions," interpolated Barlow sententiously. "Life is a thing of means."

He screwed up one eye, and glanced at her to see if his little shaft had carried home, and was more than half glad to see it had not.

"But if you start with faith," she continued, "and later on distrust comes to you, as it comes to all of us, still the two will adjust each other. If life is not wholly good, Mr. William, neither is it wholly bad;" and the grave old face was raised to his in something of appeal. "Not wholly bad! But Geoffrey doesn't seem to have any faith at all. It is all distrust, all self. What is this 'game' he talks about?"

"Oh, practically the same game he played at school, you know—elaborated a little more, with more costly apparatus, that is all."

"You mean business, I suppose?"

"Yes, in the general sense of affairs."

"Then I don't like your business, your affairs, Mr. William. I'm sorry Hetty's boy should have anything to do with affairs. He ought to have been a soldier."

"But even soldiers, you know——"

"Don't say a word against soldiers. I lived among soldiers for twenty years of my life; every soldier is a gentleman, or he ought to be."

"Ah, well," said Barlow, as he rose to go, "we all ought to be gentlemen in your meaning of the word, Miss Felicia;" and he bowed like an eighteenth-century beau over the withered hand he held in his. "Your meaning is very noble, a very fine one; but, then, God help us all, we are very human!"

She accompanied him to the hall.

"By the way," he remarked, as he got into his overcoat, "I am taking his father for a change to Queensland. He wants the change badly."

"You will be with him for a fortnight—longer perhaps?"

"Oh yes! Perhaps six weeks."

"Don't you think you could speak to him about Geoffrey? Don't you think, Mr. William, you could make him see the pity of it all?"

"Hum! Well—I'm afraid——"

"It is awful for a father to kill, as he is killing almost day by day, everything that is generous, charitable, unselfish in the boy, Mr. William; it is simply tearing God out of his heart. Do try for my sake, William, try!"

And Barlow, looking at her with a softening of the face, and in it the memory of the past and its dead story, answered—

"I will try for your sake, Felicia; I will try."

CHAPTER IV

ONE!

"Binguela."

They lifted him into the cart, stiff, and, except as to his loin-cloth, naked as on the day he was born.

Two!

"Kalidam."

They placed him by the side of Binguela, his brother in death.

Three! Four! Five!

"Wegai, Touro and Mattemba" completed the load. Then the cart, drawn by a draught-horse released from the plough for this daily duty, went jolting along the track to the burial-ground. There a grave, common to the five, had been prepared.

Johnson, the stolid-faced keeper of the dead-house, closed the note-book in which he kept a daily tally of the bodies given into his charge, and prepared to go on leave. Sometimes—always in midsummer—there were two deliveries, but to-day one only. It was early, seven o'clock in the morning. He would ride to the township at the port, and take his recreation at the "Planter's Rest," the two-stone weatherboard hotel where you dined at ease in your shirt-sleeves and washed the meal down with a bottle of Bass or Tennent's.

Before leaving he reported himself to the Resident

Medical Superintendent, whose bungalow was some distance from the Kanaka Hospital.

The Doctor was a bachelor not yet arrived at middle age, but with hair already iron-grey. He was a taciturn man, abstracted and given to introspection.

"Come in!" This in reply to Johnson's respectful knock.

He entered. The room was sparsely furnished and uncarpeted. The Doctor sat at a long deal table, whereon were arranged his microscope and some delicate instruments for making minute sections. He was a keen student of histology and prepared his own mounts, having already a valuable collection. The hands resting on the table had the long fingers, delicate but firm in touch, and the muscular wrist of the surgeon.

"Well, Johnson?"

"I am going on leave, sir."

"Key!" The disciplined Johnson laid it on the table.

The Doctor raised his head momentarily, then bent again over his work. But Johnson lingered.

"Hem!"

"Yes! What is it, man?"

"I would like the night off, sir."

"Who can take your place?"

"There's Williams——"

"Can't spare Williams. How does that boy with you shape—what's his name?"

"Tonnekar. Tonicky they call him, sir, from the way he swigs physic. Never saw such a boy."

"Cough any better?"

"Seems worse every day."

"You'll have him on your hands before long, Johnson."

"S'pose so."

"Well, be back sharp to-morrow. I'll make shift with Tonnekar."

Johnson retired.

Gool Singh, the Indian or Cingalese servant—he was the Medical Superintendent's only attendant—sounded the gong for breakfast. He was a rare artist in curries, could cook rice and toast Bombay duck to perfection. With a handful of fire and a few pots and pans he worked culinary marvels.

Breakfast over, the doctor lit his pipe and strolled round the few plots of upturned soil that constituted the garden. He could give himself half an hour, and there would be still a good hour left for work with the microscope before the morning round of the hospital fell due. He inhaled the morning air with keen zest. The sun was not yet too hot for comfort; the last touch of the night air lingered.

The bungalow, flanked on three sides by a deep verandah, was situated on the bank of a creek, though removed sufficiently to allow for the vagaries of its course when, in the rainy season, it became swollen to the proportions of a river. On the opposite bank was a cane brake, the slope itself covered with a tangle of sweet potato, the massed leaves starred with blue flowers. Beyond the green-topped field of cane stood the primeval scrub, a tangle of tropical vegetation, too distant, however, to enable the eye to distinguish growth from growth, with the exception of the dominating palms lifting their crests above the underwood. The extreme distance was filled with a range of blue-tinted mountains. Above not a cloud broke the space of sky.

The Doctor stooped, and, picking a spray of aromatic leaves, rolled it between his fingers. For a moment the fragrance carried him out of himself, back in the years, to his boyhood. The faces of the dead looked up at him, as the great pain of life tugged at his heart. The lines of his face hardened. Knocking the ashes from his pipe against the verandah post, he turned to go indoor.

As he was about to enter the house the sound of a horse and trap on the track leading to the bungalow arrested him. Probably it was some planter with a woeful tale—boys down with dysentery and seeking beds for them in the hospital. However, it was overcrowded; he could take in no more.

In the early eighties the traffic in Island labour was still at its height in sub-tropical Queensland, ill-regulated and often accompanied by features that did little credit to the white man's standard of humanity. At this time a number of New Guinea and New Ireland boys had been recruited. They came from almost the equatorial line to a land relatively cold and damp. Accustomed to a diet of fish, taro, yam and cocoanut, they were fed almost exclusively on "bulla-ma-cow" and sweet potato. The consequence was that they died by the score from tuberculosis, fever, ague and dysentery. For months at a time the plough-horse would make a journey morning and evening with a full load from the morgue, as the galvanized iron shed was called, to the burial-place. The hospital itself was a weatherboard building on the usual piles capped with tin-plates to avoid the ravages of white-ant. It was surrounded by a ten-foot-wide verandah.

The doctor waited the coming of the trap. A buggy containing two men drove up to the steps leading to the verandah. They were both well on the shady side of middle life; one, the driver, thin of body and with clean-shaved face; the other, half supported by his companion against whom he leant heavily, was full of body, florid-faced, with close-cut beard.

"Sorry to trouble you, Doctor," said the former. "My friend is in trouble. He hasn't been well for some time past, but yesterday he got a touch of the sun, or what looks like it. He was so bad last night that this morning

I harnessed up first thing and have done a good ten miles 'cross country to reach you."

The Doctor gave a whistle, and at the signal Singh appeared and held the horse's head whilst the sick man was lifted from the trap.

"We'll have him in the surgery. Boy, take the horse round and put him up. You'll probably have to stay some time."

Between them they carried the patient into the house and laid him on a rattan couch.

"When did it happen?"

"About midday yesterday."

"Pity you couldn't get him here before. Heat, you think?"

"Yes; but really I don't know. That I suppose is for you to say."

The surgery door opening on to the verandah at the side of the house was shaded by venetian blinds. The Doctor adjusted them to let in the full light and looked down at the man on the couch, who lay there comatose, his face flushed, his breathing stertorous.

The Medical Superintendent stood thus for a full minute, and it spoke well for his self-control that the man standing at his side saw no indication of the shock of recognition that struck him like a physical blow.

"Your friend's name?"

"Merton! Hugh Merton."

"And yours, sir?"

"Barlow. William Barlow."

"Thank you. Mine is Rockleigh."

"Rockleigh? One doesn't often come across the name, and by an odd coincidence my friend is a member of the firm, is, in fact, the firm—for there are no other partners—of Rockleigh and Merton! Rockleigh, poor fellow, died

many years ago, but they keep up the old firm name. It would be still more odd if you were related."

"Well, I have heard my mother talk of a—a relative in the firm." He was kneeling by the side of the couch, looking intently into the sick man's eyes, the half-closed lids of which he raised for the purpose.

He twisted partially round towards Barlow.

"Mr. Merton has been travelling; business or pleasure?"

"Well, partly on business, partly for health's sake."

"A keen man of business?"

"None keener. His life and soul are in it."

"Ah! Have you noticed anything of late strange, unusual; anything eccentric in his manner?"

"Well, now you ask me, I have. He's been very irritable—very irritable of late."

Rockleigh was busy unfastening the patient's clothing. "The modern alienist has a rough-and-ready classification for mental troubles—worry, wine, women. Which is it?"

"Well, I should say a lot of the first, some of the second, but, so far as I know, none of the third; then, one rarely does know anything about the third. The fact is, Doctor, we are old friends, and so far as his private affairs go, I am his legal adviser, though we live, he in Sydney and I in Golden City, a long distance away. Still, I go backward and forward now and again. He's been worried pretty badly for some time past. No! not domestic affairs; he is a widower with one child only—a mere lad. It's business worry. Merton is the sort of man who will either make a huge fortune or come an awful cropper." Then, after a pause, "You can't keep the machinery going full steam ahead all the time without—you understand——"

"Whisky?"

"Yes. It's the cursed nipping does it—and the pace,

of course. It's been getting a bit bad of late with him, and so——"

"So you persuaded him to go away, I suppose?"

"Yes. We left home three weeks ago. He had some idea of putting a bit of money into sugar. Believed there was something in it, with vacuum pans and up-to-date machinery. There's a place up here a bit encumbered—one of the opportunities business men look for, you know!"

"Perfectly. The adage 'Your misfortune my opportunity' fits it, I suppose?"

"That's rather a cold-blooded way of putting it; but something of that kind," and he looked askance at the Medical Superintendent.

"Well, Mr. Barlow," said the latter, rising to his feet, "you may have been in time with your friend, or you may not. Will you help me to carry him into this room?" He opened a door that led into a small bedroom, the guest-chamber of the house. "I'm afraid you will have to make this place your home for, at all events, a few days."

"It will be an awful bother to you, Doctor."

"Oh, that's all right. May I offer you my room?"

"Turn you out of your bed? Not I; give me a shake-down somewhere."

"Well, we'll see what we can do. Boy!"

Singh answered the summons so silently that he seemed to come as the genius at the rubbing of the lamp.

"Breakfast for this gentleman. Then screen off a corner of the verandah, and ask Williams to let you have a stretcher and bedding from the reserve stock. Fix up a camp."

They placed Merton on the bed, first removing coat and waistcoat. The Doctor returned to the surgery, where he obtained a dose of calomel. He put it on the sick man's tongue, then wrung out a wet towel and placed it across his temples.

"That's all I can do for him at present." He recalled the Cingalese and gave him some brief instructions. "Now I have my morning round to do; will you excuse me? Make yourself at home; the boy will look after you. If you take spirits, you will find the rum, bitters, and some swizzle-sticks on the sideboard. Singh will attend to it and hunt you up some seltzer."

Then the Doctor left Barlow to himself and crossed the open space to the hospital where Williams awaited him. The beds were placed on either side of a broad passage-way. At some he stopped for a few moments only, at others for a longer time. As he walked along, the staring eyes of the boys who huddled under their blankets, despite the increasing heat of the morning, were fixed on him.

"No big fellow pain to-day, eh? What name?" consulting the card on wall at the head of the bed. "You, Bouleman?"

A grunt from Bouleman. "Plenty pain, this fellow," touching his head. Rockleigh put his hand on the throbbing temples, and Bouleman felt the relief of the cool palm. Williams noted the instructions given to him, and they passed on.

"Better, Jimmy?" touching the wasted arm of a young Hebridese, who looked up at him in the apathy of extreme weakness. "Plenty medicine, this fellow," to Williams.

Jimmy made a faint protest, appeal writ large in his bloodshot eyes. "No like messen; plenty bite that fellow."

"Tommy Malicola, sir!" interposed Williams, as they went on to the next bed.

"Well?"

"He's at the old game, Doctor!" Williams said it with a sigh of disgust and despair.

Tommy Malicola was sitting up in bed.

"Well, Tommy! You go work to-morrow. This fellow all right, eh?"

"Go die this fellow!" responded Tommy, doggedly.

Williams shrugged his shoulders. It was "the old game." The wardsman was a man of strong religious views, and the fatalism of the Islanders was against all his notions of the right attitude of man towards his Maker. It was "unchristian," beside being prejudicial to the vital statistics of the hospital. He waged a continuous but fruitless war against this primeval faith in fate. He had expended much breath in argument and persuasion with Tommy Malicola, but in vain. Tommy had made up his mind to die, and die he would. Neither doctor, dispenser, nor wardsman should save him. The pendulous loops cut in the lobes of his ears were loaded with shell rings; the tusk of a wild boar, a descendant of Captain Cook's stock, was strung by a piece of twine round his neck. Shell amulets adorned his arms. In the hole drilled into the point of his nose a straw was struck. His woolly head was garnished with feathers and scarlet hibiscus blossoms. By the side of the bed sat his mate, who had come from a neighbouring plantation to assist at this ceremonious passing of Tommy. They were side by side in mute companionship. The mate might have been a cross between some gigantic blackbird and an equally gigantic robin redbreast. He was clad in a soldier's scarlet coat of antique pattern, with padded breast, brass buttons, and stiff upright collar—ancient commissariat stores, disposed of for a trifle. On his head was a billycock hat, with a piece of tinselled stuff wound round it.

It was in the presence of such majesty that Tommy Malicola crossed the river.

The Doctor paused before an empty bed.

"One of those"—here Williams paused to mentally fill in an appropriate epithet—"New Ireland boys. He got away last night." Williams shuffled his feet uneasily and coughed.

"This sort of thing will do us a lot of harm. You know how eager the newspapers are!"

Williams looked harried and aggrieved. "Well, I do my best, sir. We all do our best, but the deuce himself couldn't watch 'em. If you take your eyes off for half a minute, then it's a clean streak for the cane!"

"You must send some one across the creek to make a search."

"Well, Johnson's away; and if I leave them short here, it will be another and another. They are just wilder than the wild beasts. Why, the other day up at Billington's, they ran down a New Guinea boy in the scrub, and when they hauled him home, dashed if they didn't peg him out on a board like a bloomin' butterfly. Stretched him out in a sort of Andrew's cross. Then they gave him just enough to keep the life in him, a drop of water and a banana. You'd think that would about do for his natural cussedness, wouldn't you? Not a bit of it. They slacked him off the board and he was that stiff he couldn't move. But when they took their eyes off him for a moment he was through the open door like a streak. They picked him up in the cane next day stoney dead."

"Poor devil! It's good to be a Christian, Williams."

"It is, sir!" assented Williams, and the Doctor glanced at him quizzically.

"After all, it's part of the game, I suppose."

"Beg pardon?"

"Oh, nothing—I was only wondering whether it really paid. You understand, these deaths — these losses of property."

"Pay! Oh, it pays all right. When God made the cane, He made the nigger with it—you can't have one without the other."

"Inscrutable wisdom, Williams."

"Yes, sir!"

When the Doctor returned to the bungalow, he found Barlow taking his ease in a hammock slung on the shady side of the verandah. He paid a visit to the sick man, and, returning, drew a deck-chair to the side of the hammock.

"I've had a look round your room, surgery, or whatever you call it, in your absence. You don't mind, do you?"

"Not at all, though I'm afraid there's little in it to interest you."

"What is it you have on the table? I certainly did shy off that. Something like a sheep's brain."

"Well, it is brain, but not a sheep's. You see, there are some advantages about this place; it gives the opportunity of learning one's anatomy through and through. We have so many bodies, and on the dissecting table a Kanaka is as good as a king. Now, a body in my student days ran into money. Only a comparatively rich man could have one all to himself; as to the rest of us, we poor ones, we clubbed together, one taking an arm, another a leg, a third the head, and so on. I did, however, once indulge in the luxury of a whole body to myself, and I dissected every inch of it. Surgery has always attracted me more than medicine; medicine, you know, is, after all, a very empirical affair; but surgery is both an exact science and a high art. I always had an ambition to be a surgeon; not one of the many who make a cut at a venture and locate an artery when it spouts, but one who knows the artery is there when he puts the knife in. That is what distinguishes the good from the average man. There are plenty of us who can slash at a venture, but few—very few—who know exactly what will happen."

"So that's your reason for being here?"

"It is one reason, but not the sole one. There is the necessity of the pocket, you know."

"Oh!"

"However, I'm not wasting time. There are, I dare say, few men this side of the world who have done more practical work in morbid anatomy than I have within these past two years."

"You like it?" questioned Barlow, with a feeling of repulsion.

"Intensely."

"No accounting for taste, I suppose. Let's change the subject. You have some odd things in the glass-case in the corner. What are the arrows for, those with the little brass caps?"

"Oh, the caps are just a precaution. The arrows themselves are curios in their way."

"Got a story?"

"Scarcely that. You see, I was for some years a ship's doctor, and when in port had little to do beyond amusing myself as best I could. We made one trip to British Guiana—a heaven-forsaken part of the Empire. There was nothing to do in the miserable port beyond catching fever, so I made a trip inland. Now the only prior association in my mind with British Guiana was in connection with a very interesting poison. Poisons, you know, are the romance spots in the pharmacopœia."

"Yes. Medical jurisprudence is the point of contact between our professions."

"Exactly. I dare say you have read of the poison I mean, curare—or, as the Indians pronounce it, woorarii. They say Sir Walter Raleigh knew of it. Perhaps he did, but it is only of recent years that much attention has been paid to it; nowadays any good chemist will provide you with curarine. However, it was the crude poison that interested me. The travellers' tales about the stuff, the mystic ceremonies that accompanied its preparation in the

mountains, the sort of thing which takes hold of the imagination, left their impress on me. As a matter of fact, it is simply a highly concentrated extract from the bark of a shrub; but the early stories about it made out that it was a subtle compound in which the poison bags of deadly snakes, poisonous ants, bitter herbs, cayenne pepper, and Heaven knows what else played a part. It's toxic phenomena——"

"Eh! You mean the way it works?"

"Yes; but perhaps that wouldn't interest you. One characteristic of the poison, possibly its exclusive characteristic, is that it is almost impossible to trace it in a dead body. You can with almost absolute certainty trace every other known poison, but curare might baffle you six times out of seven. The stuff itself is—well, not unlike any other black resinous-looking matter, and may be safely handled, as I've often seen the Canuka Indians handle it, provided you have no cuts or scratches on the hands. The points of the little reed arrows are dipped in it and they are blown through a pipe. Wonderful shots the Canukas are with them, too. Occasionally, of course, an accident happens. I remember one day a young fellow blew an arrow, it glanced off a tree and struck his wife—full on the breast. She was dead in less than ten minutes. It is a very rapid poison, though of course it may be restrained, if not neutralized, by other poisons with a counter-action—at least, I've been experimenting in that direction."

"I suppose," said Barlow thoughtfully, "a man—a medical man who knew all about these things—could commit a dozen murders and cover up his tracks every time?"

The Doctor did not reply. Perhaps he did not hear the remark. He was lying back in his chair gazing intently at the rafters of the verandah roof. Barlow waited a minute and then coughed, but without avail.

"Doctor?"

"Yes! I beg your pardon. I'm afraid I was woolgathering, as the children say."

"Oh, it doesn't matter! I was only thinking I wouldn't care to know about all these things, and how to use them—and have a terrible edge on some man."

The Doctor laughed.

"I'd burn the confounded things if they were mine."

"Oh, they're safely locked up; and besides they are useful. Last year I carried out quite a series of experiments with them."

"The devil you did!" said Barlow, looking at him dubiously.

"Oh, on frogs; but curare operates comparatively slowly on cold-blooded creatures. One has to allow for that. I was seeking an antidote; so far none has been discovered that is really reliable, though the Canukas claim another herb to be so."

"Found it?"

"Well, I'm not quite sure. It was successful in the case of the frog, but the real test remains."

"You—I suppose you—never try your experiments on the poor devils over there?" inclining his head towards the hospital.

"Oh no! Though"—with a laugh—"a place like this has its temptations, hasn't it?"

Barlow glanced at him from the corner of his eye, wondering that mortal man should look at the issue of life and death, with all its potentialities of agony, on the plane of mere experiment. This wider, sanely cold-blooded outlook of science on life was new to him—unpleasantly new.

"Let us again change the subject," he suggested, and Rockleigh assented with a smile; and this time Barlow took the lead, and amused his host for a good hour with the humours of a gold field—from the legal point of view.

The Cingalese sounded the gong for tiffin.

CHAPTER V

THE wretched creature lay a black, inanimate mass in the heart of the field, the tall knotted stems of the cane with their plumes of green and yellow leaves rising high above him. The eye of the Doctor, trained to observation, noted the break, and he made a guess at the cause. Leaving his horse on the cart track, he forced his way to it and found the missing boy. Quite a youngster, too! He turned over the body till the face stared up at him. Clean of skin—they were not always thus—his body was so emaciated that the ribs and sternum showed in bold relief against the dark brown surface. He would have him brought in, so that the tally might be complete. The escape of patients savoured of indifferent surveillance.

Returning to the broad track he mounted his horse. It was late in the afternoon, but he could still hear in the distance the humming of the mill. On the way homeward the carts coming in with their loads passed him; the Decauville system of portable lines, with their miniature trains of trucks, had not yet reached so far north. On many of the carts the boy who drove, taking a forbidden lift, was perched on the load. In the fields boys were still at work. Tanna boys, Solomon Island boys with broad, good-natured faces, and here and there a scraggy-limbed New Irelander, recently recruited. Many were naked but for their loin cloths; others wore moles, cotton shirts, and had soft hats with

feathers and flowers stuck in the bands. A group of Marys —the coloured women who worked together — stopped gathering the cut cane to gaze at him, only too desirous of some excuse for a momentary rest. They made picturesque groups, in their printed cotton skirts, with bright-coloured handkerchiefs knotted about their heads. Here and there a little bald-pated, beady-eyed piccaninny peeped over his mother's shoulder from the cloth in which he had been bound to her back. On either side of the road for its greater length rose high walls of cane. He reached at length the open square. Here the mill stood, and boys and Marys were carrying bundles of cane, stripped of their leaves, from the carts to the travelling-way. Away went the cane to the close-set rollers. With the crackle of fireworks it disappeared, the scarlet, rose pink, or yellow lengths coming out at the further side but mangled strips. The juice flowed in a white foamy stream into the trough below. Other boys were busy raking away the megass, the crushed fragments of the cane, spreading it out to dry; for it would afterwards be used as fuel, and, in the irony of things, furnish the motive power by which its brothers, still waving their heads in the air, would be done to death. "Boys" were working in the midst of a cloud of vapour, stirring up the boiling juice in the batteries with long handled stir-abouts. The whole scene was one of bustle and movement, in contrast to the long avenue of still uncut cane down which he had come.

The way home from the plantation led by a track through the scrub to the river. The pathway of rich chocolate soil was barred by shafts of broken light; along its margin the wild taro spread its lily-shaped leaves; fan palms were set in radiating circles of green and gold among the creepers and the vines. Looking backward along the perspective of the track, through the tremulous patches of

warm light, past the infinite variety of greens, he caught a glimpse of the open canefield.

He reached the creek. A tall tree wreathed in trailing plants overshadowed the water. The precipitous bank was clothed with a velvet mantle of young ferns. Below, in the shadow of the tree, lay a deep pool where he could see the fish swim slowly past. On the opposite side was another cane brake. In the breath of the evening air it rustled with the sound of a distant sea breaking on a shingled beach. Here and there were patches of corn, golden cobs breaking through the dried yellow husk. The ground was in places strewn with the small red apples of the wild tomato, which, climbing up the long canes, adorned them with clusters of pendulous fruit. It was the same creek that threaded its way through scrub and brake to the foot of the hospital garden. He rode along the bank some distance, came to a shallow ford, and gained the high road.

Before he reached the hospital grounds the sun had set, with the precipitancy characteristic of tropical and sub-tropical countries. Out of the low-lying lands that spread back from the course of the creek rose a silver mist, slowly diffusing itself on either side till the fields of cane were blotted out, and the tall timber in the scrub made wooded islands on a sea of vapour.

In the mean time Barlow, left to his own resources, ventured on a trip of exploration. He inspected the paddock where his horse had been turned out, and found him quietly feeding on such scant herbage as the place afforded. He avoided the hospital as if it were a plague-spot, and took a track through the cleared land beyond the paddock that led him to the made road connecting the district with the port. Along this road he tramped sturdily; he had been a good walker in the days of his youth, and all his vigour had not yet departed. He must

have travelled quite three miles when, warned by the long shadows cast across his path, he turned homeward. Already the cane-fields on either side were turned to gold; a minute later the sun sank behind them, the western sky became one great opal, with its blending of green and rose and blue, then, flushing into a broad band of lake, went down with the flame of a blood-red ruby. Long wisps of silvery mist, the ghost-fingers of the coming night, stole through the tall rustling canes, blurring and mingling the dimly defined outlines of the landscape.

By the time he reached the hospital gates he had to light a match to assure himself of their identity. Passing through, a quarter of a mile had still to be traversed before he could reach the welcome shelter of the bungalow. The roughly made road, its only formation being the removal of stumps, was well defined in daytime, but in the darkness that now obscured everything he had to resort to the bush trick of sounding the ground with his foot to assure himself of the track. He stumbled on blindly, got off the road, failed to recover his way, and suddenly became aware of some opposing obstacle. He felt it rather than saw it,—felt it not with the physical touch of the hand, but by the intuitive sense of an impending danger.

"Confound it! Where am I now?" He put out his hand and felt the ribbed surface of galvanised iron sheeting. As he did so the slow and regular rasp of a saw caught his ear. It stopped. Went on again with a sharp cutting note—a note pitched higher than that of a saw ripping smoothly through wood. He remembered afterwards how this struck him at the time. Then the saw stopped, and some one within the hut was seized with a paroxysm of coughing. When it ceased he heard the laboured breathing of one whose strength is exhausted. Then, after a pause, the high-pitched note of the saw began

again. It set Barlow's teeth on edge as, feeling his way round the walls, he came at length to the door. From underneath it a weak ray of light escaped into the outer darkness.

"Hi, there!" and he thumped with his fist. "Open the door! I've lost my way."

The saw stopped, and clumsy feet moved to the door.

"Be quick."

The owner of the clumsy feet fumbled at the lock. The door opened.

Barlow looked past the hollow-eyed Kanaka who held it open, into the dimly lit space beyond. The odour of death filled the place. A candle guttered in an improvised lamp made out of a broken bottle. Its feeble light, flickering in the draught from the open door, caught the bright steel of the saw and lit up the work it was doing.

He must have shrieked like a frightened child as he stumbled back into the mist, for when the Doctor, walking his horse along the track in full assurance that the beast would find his way home, came upon him he remarked, "Did you call? I thought I heard someone cry out a few seconds ago. Was it you?"

Then Barlow shook himself with the shudder of one who casts away an unclean presence.

"That's an awful business down there, doctor!"

Rockleigh felt the tremor passing through Barlow's hand as it rested on the shoulder of the horse.

"Oh!" he replied with an amused laugh. "So you struck the morgue in your wandering? Was the boy at work?"

"Work!" repeated Barlow, and he drew in a breath as though the cold south wind had struck him. "Work! such work!"

"It is a boy who died to-day. He had a curiously

developed anthropoid head. That was only Tonnekar removing the skull-cap. Investigation on the thin line between man and the beast—and it is a very thin line sometimes, Mr. Barlow—is one of the most absorbing things in the world."

"Do you mean to tell me you are going down there to-night?"

"Why not?"

"Well, I should say for every reason that mortal man could think of! Hello, there's the light of the bungalow! Thank God! I'll trouble you for some of that rum when we get home."

Rockleigh had dismounted, and, walking by his horse, led the way home.

Gool Singh met them.

The Cingalese interested Barlow. He had during the day addressed him several times, but received no answer beyond a respectful salaam. Yet he seemed to understand perfectly what was required of him.

The first duty of the Doctor on entering the house was to visit the sick man. Barlow accompanied him, and Singh was in attendance. The latter nodded intelligently to the questions Rockleigh put to him in an undertone that did not reach Barlow's ear distinctly. Merton lay apparently unconscious, or it might be in deep sleep. His breathing was less laboured, the face less livid.

"What do you think, Doctor? Do you think—think he'll die?" Barlow uttered the word reluctantly. "He looks queer, doesn't he. Poor old chap! He looks awfully queer."

Rockleigh, gazing intently on the prostrate man, did not reply.

"Eh! tell me the truth. It's better to face the music all the time, isn't it? Better than—than——"

"I understand. You want the truth. Well, he may die at any minute. I'm afraid that's the naked truth, Mr. Barlow."

"Good God, Doctor, is it really as bad as that? I can't realize it. Only yesterday he was as clear-headed, as self-possessed, as he had ever been. I had a long talk with him about his son. He beat me down with sheer solid worldly wisdom till I hadn't a leg to stand on and felt ashamed of my own arguments; and now to think of him here—may die any moment, you say. Poor fellow! He had a dog's life when he was a bit of a chap, and somehow it seemed to have influenced him all through; but he could fight. If he gave no quarter, Doctor, he never asked a man for it—never!"

"He is making a hard fight of it now. Nine out of ten men would have gone under before this."

"If dogged does it, he'll pull through. Mark my words, he won't die easily. If only Geoffrey were here!"

"Geoffrey?"

"His son. He has only one child—the apple of his eye. It's hard for him to go out like this. Like one of your Kanakas, for the matter of that—not a soul of his own near him to hold his hand or to close his eyes when it is all over."

The Cingalese sounded the gong. It was dinner-time.

"One moment, Mr. Barlow. Just hold his arm till I inject some ether."

He took the hypodermic syringe, filled it and punctured the skin of the arm held extended by Barlow.

"They ease the way down a lot nowadays, don't they?" remarked Barlow as he put the arm back with a touch of tenderness. "I suppose when it comes to the point one doesn't mind it much. Judging by the old-fashioned pious

shocker, the atheist and that sort of folk made a great fuss about it. All fairy tale, eh?"

"I've seen many deaths, and I cannot recall one where, at the end, there was any evidence of realization. Mother Nature is not an unkind nurse; the way of death is to the exhausted body the way to a great, a blessed rest."

"Hum! Like falling asleep—just like kiddies. Never had any of my own, Doctor. Never will, I suppose; but the sight of a kiddie curled up in his father's arms, secure, asleep, always brings my dormant paternity to the surface."

Rockleigh smiled. "In nine cases out of ten the child is a vulnerable point. There are men you can't reach direct, with hides so thick that no weapon can pierce them; but touch the child, and you have them at your mercy."

"It's odd. We were talking of the boy when it happened."

The gong sounded again, and they turned away.

After dinner, the Doctor once more went his rounds, and later on worked for an hour in the morgue. Barlow, on the verandah, saw him enter the surgery, and made a guess at the contents of the covered earthen vessel he carried in his hand.

Later, he joined his guest, and they sat together on the verandah, smoking long Trichinopolis drawn from the Doctor's stores.

"A bit strong, these smokes of yours, Doctor. Get on the nerves!"

"Perhaps, if one smoked too many. I get them through Gool Singh, or, rather, I did get them. Poor devil!"

"Queer chap, that Indian of yours. Sort of Sphinx. Never said a word the whole day."

"Nor will he to-morrow or the day after. He is dumb."

"Dumb?"

"Yes. He came to the hospital from one of the plantations with cancer in the tongue."

"Awful!"

"We operated, and I took the tongue away."

Barlow changed his position in the chair, and threw away the half-consumed cigar. "No, thanks; I won't smoke any more." He was silent for a little while. "I wonder how you stand it."

"Stand what?"

"Living here. I wouldn't live here and do the things you do for all the riches of—what's its name?—Golconda or Peru."

Rockleigh laughed a short dry laugh.

"It's just like walking a chalked line between life and death all the time," continued Barlow. "What's that?"

A sustained tremulous wail, not unlike the cry of a dingo across a gully on a moonlight night, came from the hospital.

"A sick boy—dying, probably."

Barlow rose with a shudder, and walked up and down. "It isn't much of a world, with all this in it, is it?"

"I don't quite follow——"

"All this death, you know. Doesn't strike a fellow ordinarily. One hears of a man's death, and somehow it seems a sort of exception, a bit of hard luck for Brown or Jones. Then all day long one sees life, life; and yet, when you think of it, there's just as much death as there is life. You seem to have struck the all-death end. O, Lord!" Another cry quivered on the night air.

"Don't notice it. You'll get used to it by-and-by."

"Look here, Doctor! if it wasn't like deserting Merton, I'd put the horse in the trap and drive into the port."

"You'll be right in a day or so."

"I wouldn't face another night here—even for Merton. I'd go mad, stark staring mad!"

"Nonsense, man! Come along and have a good stiff nobbler!" And, taking him by the arm, he led him into the dining-room and poured out a very liberal nip of rum. Barlow took it willingly, nay, eagerly. "Now you'd better turn in. If anything should happen I'll let you know. Good-night."

CHAPTER VI

THE Medical Superintendent, enjoying the moonlight night, smoked his cigar to the end before he finally vacated the deck-chair on the verandah. Then he went indoors.

A lamp was burning low in the surgery. He turned it up, and drawing a book from one of the shelves which held his limited library, consulted it. Apparently it did not give him the information he sought. Going on his knees he searched in a cupboard near the French window opening on the verandah—the companion wing to that in which Barlow's extemporized bed-chamber was situated. With some difficulty he at length found what he needed, and got up with a notebook in his hand. Drawing a chair within the circle of light, he turned the leaves slowly. They contained notes he had made on the British Guiana trip, concerning his inquiry into the properties of curare. The results of recent experiments with the drug were still fresh in his memory. What troubled him was the answer to a question the unfortunate frog had not satisfactorily solved. With a lack of consideration for the ends of science, he had expired prematurely. The gradual impairment of the heart's action, of respiration, and, most notable of all, the arrestment, if not paralysis, of motor power—all these the frog had told him as plainly as though it had said them in so many words. But the secret he desired to know above all else, the vivisector's knife had failed to discover.

It suspended motor power, but did it also suspend cerebral activity? If, in other words, the frog were a man, then, though every muscle were relaxed, though the tongue were speechless and the ear irresponsive to every test, could he hear, could he think? This was the doubt he wished to solve.

Five years ago Rockleigh had groped his way from the firm's office in the silent warehouse, muttering that "some day" sacred to revenge would come. "Some day" was now translated into "to-day." Merton was in his grasp, at his mercy—the murderer of his father, sister, mother. Had Merton compassed their deaths by physical violence he would have been no more their murderer than he had been through subtle temptation, treacherous advice, the rape of the means whereby they lived, and finally the cynical renunciation of all claim upon his mercy.

Every day of these five years he had fed his lust for revenge by the memory of his mother's sacrifice, the ruined life of his sister, yielded to make his own secure.

Humanity admits only of the broadest classifications. Each life is within itself a ganglion of inconsistencies. Here was a student, a scientist who looked at the physical phenomena of life in dry light, and yet an emotionalist, introspective, morbidly imaginative, capable at once of shutting out all thought of physical suffering when his mind was concentrated on a critical operation, yet of such keenly sympathetic emotions that in his thoughts he crucified himself daily on the cross of his dead. On the purely intellectual side he was at times conscious dimly of the morbid strain in his nature. In days withdrawn from the routine of his lonely life, odd days spent in healthful association with his fellow-men, in the full air, in cheerful surroundings, he had a vague appreciation of some unhealthy influence warping his nature. Mental and moral

attitudes, like drug habits persisted in, replace freedom by slavery. At the end of five years he was no longer capable of exercising a rational judgment on the matter.

Now the daily recurrent "some day" had realized itself. The reflex action of his dual nature prompted some form of vengeance that would be experimental. He had often contemplated such an experiment. There is an odd quantity in the human totality incapable of analysis, a something which eludes the knife, a quantity with a variable quality answering to our arbitrary conceptions of good and evil. The psychologist calls it the "ego;" the theologian, the "soul."

That this ego took its quality, its colour so to speak, from the physical life of man and the exterior forces that played on it, he had no doubt. Experiment had made clear that it was so. What if he could use Merton thus! Merton the outcast, Merton the hewer of wood, the drawer of water, the past blanked out—what a new Merton to evolve! What a revenge! Men had toiled and sweated for him, been broken to make his fortune. Let him bear the yoke he had placed on others!

The mental excitement of the idea induced a sympathetic restlessness of body. He paced the little room and muttered to himself—a habit induced by the isolation of his life.

Well, the opportunity had come! He entered the room where Merton lay, a shaded light by his bedside. He turned the shade so that the light could fall upon the face. It was beaded with sweat. Consciousness would return for a time at least—and after, he would make his venture into the Unknown.

He sat down and waited patiently. Ten minutes, quarter of an hour, the half-hour. There was a slight

movement of the hand resting on the light coverlet thrown across his loins.

Slowly the obscured senses drifted into consciousness. His eyes opened with the glint of returned intelligence in them.

"Where am I?" The words came in a whisper.

"In hospital. You were brought here sick—very sick."

"Where—where is Barlow?"

"Here. He will come to you presently."

"Are you the doctor?"

"Yes."

"What is the matter with me? Is it bad—serious? Tell me."

"Yes, it is bad."

"Very bad?"

"You are dying." It was brutally said and in the teeth of professional convention, but then "some day" had come.

Rockleigh rose with an exclamation of alarm. For the moment he feared that he had gone too far, that the man had escaped him. With a convulsive twitch of the muscles, as though a lash had been laid across his face, Merton momentarily collapsed. The agony in the groan that passed his lips would have moved most men to compassion. But the dominant thought in Rockleigh's mind was that the man might slip through his fingers after all.

He recovered, however, almost as quickly as he had collapsed.

"Oh my God! dying, dying! Can't you save me, Doctor? I'll pay you anything you want—anything."

"You can buy most things, Mr. Merton, but you can't buy life. It's not in the market." But Merton was too dazed to follow the words.

"Barlow! I want Barlow. Billy, come to me! For God's sake, come to me!"

Barlow, resting on a camp stretcher, moved in his light sleep and drew the blue hospital blanket over his head. Was ever such a terrible place? Some poor devil of a Kanaka dying in the night watches! He shuddered and lay still. A hand was laid on him.

"Mr. Barlow!"

"Yes?"

"Get up! Your friend is dying. He is conscious now and may have something to say to you."

Barlow rose and followed him to the bedroom.

"Oh, Billy! I am dying—dying! Oh my God! my God! Billy! Billy!"

Barlow gripped the hand that lay on the coverlet, plucking at it as if seeking something to hold on the way through the valley.

"Old man! old man!" was all Barlow found to say, his face almost as pale as the moonlight that flooded the garden without.

"If you have any business to transact with Mr. Merton," broke in the level voice of the Medical Superintendent, "you had perhaps better attend to it now."

Merton, catching the words and gripping their full intent, looked at Barlow in mute agony.

"I have his will, doctor, it is all right. No change, old man? All to the boy as before?"

He nodded. "You will take care of him, Billy?"

Barlow pressed the hand he held, and Merton looked at him steadily.

"I never bought you, Barlow, and yet you've stuck by me."

"Oh yes, of course!" replied Barlow vaguely. He had never analyzed the why or the wherefore of their friendship.

Perhaps it was that, conscious of an underlying weakness in himself, he had an attraction to this opposite. Merton could fight—not always fairly; then his early life had been brutally hard, and one had to allow for that.

"I'll take care of him as if he were my own, Merton."

"There are only two things possible in life, Billy. I've told you often—top dog or bottom dog. He's got to be on top."

"All right, Merton! Don't worry about the lad. You've taught him all that."

"Tell him it was my last word to him—the top or nothing."

"The top or nothing!" repeated Barlow mechanically.

Merton looked at him wistfully, pride struggling against the revelation he had to make. "Barlow!" His voice was low and indistinct; and Barlow knelt by the bedside to hear it. When he rose amazement was written large on his face.

The Doctor, who had gone into the adjoining room, returned, and, looking at the sick man, laid his hand on Barlow's arm.

"I must ask you to leave."

"But he's——"

He checked himself at the word.

"Can't I stay through?"

He had withdrawn from the bedside and spoke in an undertone.

"He may linger—for hours, perhaps a day—and then go like a snuffed-out candle. Still there is always the odd chance, you know."

"You mean——"

"It is quite improbable. Still we must give him the chance for what it is worth. He must be left alone."

"You will let me know when it happens?"

"Yes."

Barlow gave the hand a final grip, and walked reluctantly to the door.

"Can't he stay?" asked Merton, following the departing figure, his eyes filled with craving.

"No. He has said good-bye to you."

Then Merton, with an effort, turned from the light and faced the blank wall.

As Barlow passed through the surgery and dining-room to the verandah his eyes glanced mechanically over the moonlit garden towards the bank sloping to the gully filled with mist till it looked like a great white lake.

He gave a start. His nerves were unstrung. Something moved down there on the margin of the lake. What was it? He stood fascinated, fearful. It seemed to crawl. A grotesque misshapen thing, man or beast, he knew not.

A sharp cry in the bedroom broke the momentary absorption, and turning he retraced his steps, conscious of a curious sensation of the scalp, as though the skin had tightened.

The Doctor met him at the bedroom door, intercepting him with polite expostulation.

"He is all right, Mr. Barlow; leave him to me."

"Doctor, give me some rum—some more rum I should say—I'm playing havoc with your supplies!"

"Nonsense! There it is on the sideboard. Help yourself. Water?"

"No—o, thanks. I'll try a drop neat."

The drop was a polite fiction. The spirit put heart in him for a time, and at Rockleigh's solicitation he returned to bed. But he could not rest. To his excited imagination the garden was alive with moving, rustling things. He peered through the narrow slits of the enclosing bamboo blinds, but could see nothing. He lay down and tried by

old-fashioned childish devices to win sleep. He counted innumerable sheep leaping a hurdle. Cursed them and the makers of all such inventions. It was no use; he could not sleep. He rose and walked the verandah. Impelled as if by some force projecting him to the discovery of new horrors, he came with each turn on the verandah nearer the obscured side, where the light in the surgery shone dimly through the French doors. Beyond a still dimmer light filled in the curtained space of the bedroom window.

"Eh! Eh! What?"

It was only the white-clad Cingalese who, rising noiselessly out of the darkness, stood before him as if, with deprecation, he barred the way. There was a suggestion of the snake in the glitter of the eyes as they momentarily caught the moonlight from the open space where Barlow stood.

Barlow—in the confusion of the moment—apologized, for what he knew not, and turned on his heel. Some indefinite association of this fellow with the grotesque thing that had moved down there in the mist passed through his dazed brain.

The dining-room, unlit, intervened between the verandah and the surgery. The outer door was open, and as Barlow passed he could see, by the interception of the slit of light under the closed inner door communicating with the surgery, that some one moved within.

In the mean time the Medical Superintendent, believing his enforced guest to have once more retired to rest, set about the work he had in hand.

He unlocked a small safe in the surgery, and opening one of two drawers beneath the space in which his books of account were kept, took out a small section of bamboo. The hollow space was filled with a black resinous mass.

It might have been pitch, the guess of a casual observer. With his pen-knife he scraped a few black specks into a measuring glass, then added water. Taking an unused hypodermic syringe from its case he waited till the specks had dissolved, then filled it with the solution.

Merton was still semi-conscious; his eyes half-closed. The Doctor opened the French doors giving access from the surgery to the verandah, and Singh, as if expectant of the signal, entered.

Together they passed into the bedroom, and the Cingalese, in obedience to the instruction given him, raised the arm of the prostrate man whilst Rockleigh, pricking the skin with the needle-point of the syringe, injected its contents.

"Wait till I want you!"

By an inclination of the head Singh intimated that he understood the order, and withdrew to the verandah.

Then Rockleigh sat on the chair by the bed. He put his hand on the man's head, and the half-closed eyes opened full.

"Listen! My name is Rockleigh; do you understand?"

There was a look of puzzlement in the man's eyes.

"Carry your mind back to one night about five years ago in your office. Ah! I see you recall it. Five years is a gap in one's life—a gap wide enough to be filled with either repentance or forgiveness. But you have not repented, Merton, neither have I forgiven. Taking the world big and large, there is a rough kind of justice in it. Sooner or later opportunity comes to all of us, eh? You had yours and you took it. This is mine and I also am taking it. That is strictly business, is it not?"

Merton gazed at him dully, in half-perception of his meaning, and that half was tinged with apprehension.

"I might let you die." Rockleigh's hand resting on the immobile arm felt a faint dying tremor pass through it.

"You may rest assured you will not die if I can save you."

He lifted the arm and let it drop. It fell with a curiously inert thud, as if robbed of all muscular resistance.

"You are passing into a new world, Merton. I am changing the station of life into which it has pleased God to call you—or so you fancy—that is all. A little while and you will have forgotten the past. Then you will realize existence with a new meaning in the word. Do you hear me?"

There was no response.

"Existence, for which men play in the game of life with two hands to grub for them—to snatch for them. A game played to the bidding of a master for the sake of a wife starved in body and soul, and children damned by an existence thrust on them. A fine game, Merton—a rattling fine game! A game that is life for scores and scores of men and women, flesh and blood as you are. My proposition, Merton—my business proposition is that you take a hand with the rest."

He rose and stood over him.

"You have no past, Merton; none! Do you hear me? The past is forgotten—dead!"

The pupils of the eyes gazing up at him dilated, then became fixed as though they had reached the extreme of their orbit.

He sounded above the heart. It conveyed to him unmistakable indication in its action. The poison was doing its work. With the noiseless rapidity of one who is accustomed to act in a time of crisis, he prepared a solution with alcohol and a minute quantity of some white crystalline salt. The salt being dissolved, he filled the

syringe and injected its contents. As an almost immediate result the heart's action was stimulated, though the muscular paralysis of the body was not appreciably relieved. Rockleigh recognized that he had no time to lose in a vital experiment of this kind. The semblance of death was sufficient to deceive all but the expert; and Barlow, wrought upon as he had been that night, would not be in a condition of mind to demand any conclusive test of death. He would see that he had just died, was not indeed yet cold in death.

Rockleigh went to the extemporized bedroom and roused him.

"Come quickly! He is dying—if not dead."

Barlow rose but half awake. He had lain down not long before and had just dropped into a light sleep.

He followed the Doctor to the bedroom.

The tension of the muscles had, under the action of the poison, relaxed so that the lids drooped over the eyes; the lower jaw fell, leaving the mouth open. There was a repulsive suggestion of withdrawn mobility, of pulp-like want of form in the face.

He had been his friend; but from this mask of death Barlow turned aside with a shudder.

Rockleigh raised the man's hand. "He must have died as I called you. His temperature is still almost normal. Feel."

Barlow obeyed as a child, but with a repulsion he could not disguise.

"Let it drop."

It fell like a lump of lead.

The Doctor took a handkerchief and bound up the fallen jaw. It was a detail to heighten the *vraisemblance*, if any such detail were needed to impress the fact of death on Barlow's mind.

"May I go?" he asked, after standing awkwardly near

the door for a minute or two, compelling himself to the ordeal. "I feel a little faint."

"Certainly! We can do nothing more."

He was glad—how glad!—to leave the little pent-in room. He would have been still more glad to have put a thousand miles between him and this place of death.

He found a deck-chair on the verandah, sat in it and looked up into the velvet softness of the sky. Truly death was awful, unthinkable!

It seemed but a few minutes since he had left the bedroom, when he heard the voice of the Doctor calling him from the dining-room. He rose, and together they went into the surgery, Barlow noting with thankfulness that the door opening into the bedroom was closed.

Rockleigh, with what seemed to Barlow indecent haste, consulted him as to the interment.

"In this climate," he explained as if excusing himself, "we have to put sentiment aside. It is a duty we owe to the living."

"It was only yesterday morning I drove him here. He and I, side by side, and now, in less than twenty-four hours —Doctor!" He sat down and rested his aching head on his hands, "I cannot realize it. It—it brings one up with a round turn. You know what I mean. Only yesterday! only yesterday!" he reiterated dully.

"You are the one friend he has here. Would you like —to help us? Johnson is away on leave. Singh and I will have to do his work."

Barlow shuddered.

"God forgive me for a miserable coward! Doctor, I couldn't do it. I am not like you, used to death."

"Then the boy and I will manage it. There!" and he laid his hand kindly on Barlow's shoulder, "go and lie down; get what rest you can."

"Do you keep coffins here? I want to take him back with me for the boy's sake."

"That would mean a lead coffin; we have nothing of that kind. You might wire from the Port to Brisbane for one; that is the only way. It would be at least a week before it reached here; and in the mean time!"—he shrugged his shoulders.

"It can't be done?"

Rockleigh shook his head decisively

"Who has he there—in Sydney? His wife is dead."

"Yes, died when the boy came. There are her relatives in Golden City. The boy is with them. He had none of his own, or I know of none. Still for Geoffrey's sake I would have liked to bury him near home."

"Some future time, if the lad wished it, the body could be exhumed and taken South."

"Yes, I suppose that is all that can be done. I ought to see him, I suppose, before——"

"Certainly! I will call you before we screw the lid down. Now try and get a little rest."

Barlow went out, the Doctor closing the door behind him. His senses were too dulled to catch the click of the lock.

"Quick! Singh. Half an hour has gone! Yes, leave the singlet on. Here is the key of the store. You will need a light. A couple of hours and dawn will be here. Hurry, man! Drag it over the ground if you cannot carry it, and lose no time."

The Cingalese opened the door from the surgery to the verandah and departed. A dull glimmer through the store-room window lasted a minute or two and then vanished. At the sound of the clumsy box grating on the verandah Rockleigh went out, and together they carried the coffin into the room. It was rudely constructed of pine, daubed

with lamp-black, an article of luxury for such dead white men as crossed the threshold of the hospital. They placed it on two chairs, Rockleigh took a sheet from the spare linen in the bedroom for a shroud, and wrapping him in it, they carried the body to the coffin.

"The sponge!"

The Cingalese, who moved about the room with the noiselessness of a cat, handed it to him. Rockleigh moistened it with water into which he let a few drops of ammonia fall, then deftly dabbed the flaccid face. The boy fanned it with a palm-leaf fan, to accelerate the superficial lowering of temperature.

Before leaving the room Rockleigh sprinkled some drops of a powerful deodorant on the carpet. He knew the value of association by the senses.

"We are ready now, Mr. Barlow!"

"So soon?"

"You forget that you are in a sub-tropical land. We must leave here soon after daybreak. The cemetery is a good twelve miles away. I shall send one of the boys ahead to let the clergyman know and have the grave ready. You wish the burial service read, I suppose?"

"Of course! of course!" replied Barlow, vacantly. Events were following each other in such rapid sequence that he had lost control of them.

They entered the room.

Barlow looked down on the shrouded figure. The pungent odour of the deodorant filled his nostrils.

"It is odd," remarked Rockleigh casually, "how quickly the temperature falls after death. Give me your hand."

He took it and placed it on the forehead. The suggestion of death made it icy cold to Barlow. His hand flinched as it touched the skin; it was death—surely death.

"Now go to the store and bring me some screws and a driver."

As Singh departed Rockleigh lifted the coffin-lid and placed it in position.

As they waited the return of Singh he remarked: "It will be daylight in a couple of hours. Dawn is the most depressing moment in all the day. Perhaps if you lie down now you may sleep till the sun is up. Try. I shall call you, and have coffee ready before we start."

Barlow, only too glad of an excuse to leave the room, accepted the suggestion and went out; but rest was not possible, so he sat in a deck-chair and waited patiently for the break of day.

Singh returned with screws and driver.

"Quick!"

They took the body from the coffin and laid it on the floor. Then the Cingalese went out to the obscured side of the verandah, remote from Barlow, and returned with a black burden on his back. It was the dead body of the missing boy carried hence from the cane-brake. They lifted it into the coffin, replaced the lid, and Rockleigh screwed it down. As he did so the Cingalese rapidly clothed Merton in a suit taken from the Doctor's room, and brought Rockleigh himself an overcoat, hat, and hand-bag.

"Hurry, boy! You have the pony in the buggy? Yes; that is right. I'll take his shoulders. Now! Keep close to the side of the house."

They raised Merton between them and carried him without difficulty to the side verandah. Thence they bore him to the slip-rails of the paddock-fence and placed him in the buggy, resting his back against the dash-board, so that the driver could steady him between his legs over the rough track they had to travel.

"I shall be back before breakfast," said Rockleigh as he climbed into the buggy. "Now, pony my lad, we have to make a record!"

Barlow heard the horse and trap drive away and thought it was the messenger sent ahead to have the grave dug, and so fell to thinking how to-morrow it might be any man's turn—it might be his. He realized as he had never realized before what life and death meant; how little a thing the life of man was in the play of elemental forces.

CHAPTER VII

SAMMY AH KONG was sleeping, dreaming it might be of the paddy-fields of his native land, when the trap drove up to the door and the voice of his master called him.

"All-li! all-li!" responded Sammy sleepily, "all-l-li!" and he rolled out of his bunk dazed, for the night before he had smoked himself into a blissful land of Oriental dreams. The rank, weedy odour given out by the black pellets of opium still clung about the place.

"All-l-li, boss." He opened the door.

"Fix up my bunk and be smart about it, Ah Kong."

Sammy lit a lamp that smoked vilely, and retired with it to an adjoining room which Rockleigh used as his own when he visited the place. He had cleared out a selector, who having partially stumped the land found that his little means were exhausted. Rockleigh bought it, and was finishing the work begun by the original holder. In time he hoped to have it under cane; then he would sell the produce to a neighbouring mill, or perhaps join others in the erection of a co-operative mill—a scheme then in the air. The humpy—for it was little more—was tenanted by the Chinaman, who had the flat down by the river under vegetables.

Ah Kong speedily arranged the bunk, and then assisted Rockleigh to lift the body out of the buggy and bring it in. They stripped it, and laid it in the rough bed of saplings

and sacking. The Doctor opened the hand-bag he had brought with him, and filled the syringe from a phial containing the antidote that so far had arrested the rapid progress of the poison. The strychnine he had added to it would brace the relaxed muscles and give renewed vitality to the heart's action, but on the antidote itself depended the issue of life or death. He was fully seized of the risk he took—aware that no concealment could be so complete as to cover all traces of the crime, but not the less he played the hazard unflinchingly. The uncertainty of the issue gave it an element of excitement. He played against Death, card for card, rattle of dice against rattle of dice.

A quarter of an hour passed, the action of the strychnine became apparent. The contraction of the facial muscles twisted the face into the semblance of a grotesque mask. For a moment it seemed as though the drug had gained a mastery over the man and would defeat the experiment; but slowly the forces of the antidote ranged themselves against it, and Rockleigh drew a deep breath as he watched the slow retroaction of the limbs, the return of the face to identity.

Another quarter passed, and yet another. The day dawned and the grey light vanished before the coming of the sun. Daylight crept in through the crevices of the shuttered window-space and the light of the smoking lamp paled before it. The Doctor turned it out; then threw open the shutter to let in the fresh air of the morning. And with the dawn came back to life the man who had murdered Rockleigh's father, his mother, the sister whose kisses were still through all the years on her brother's lips.

He lived! Yes, he lived. It was well done—a very miracle. Rockleigh felt the pride of the man who has

discovered, who has brought to light that which has been hidden from all eyes save his. He remembered now how sceptical he had been when the old Canuka medicine man, who made the poison with incantations and ceremonial rites, had put in his hand the antidote, a simple herb as common in that land as a daisy in English fields. It was true then, after all! He had doubted it, but not the less had taken the risk. In his experiments strychnine alone had failed; so also had the crystalline salt extracted from the herbal antidote—perhaps with long keeping it had lost some of its potency. However that might be, together they had succeeded. So in the event Death lost, and he took as the stake the life of his enemy.

Leaving detailed instructions with Ah Kong, who made a note of them in his tissue-paper book with a camel-hair brush and a bottle of Indian ink—for he was not of Tartar breed, but of good Mongol blood and some literary attainment—the Doctor got into his trap, promising to return before nightfall. He reached the bungalow without attracting the attention of Barlow, who at daybreak had left the vicinity of the house, hoping to escape to a less oppressive atmosphere.

After a cheerless breakfast together—the dead at rest in the adjoining room—they carried the coffin to a spring cart brought by special messenger from a neighbouring plantation, and set out for the cemetery.

Barlow drove his own buggy, the Doctor accompanying him. It was nearly noon when, by walking and trotting, they reached the burial ground. They had to wait half an hour till the grave, begun some time before, had been dug to the regulation depth. Then the clergyman, who himself had ridden some miles, put on his surplice. Barlow assisted to take the coffin from the cart, and as he raised it on his shoulder felt the inert body shift slightly in position. He

waited till the grave was filled in, and when the grave-digger gave the heaped up mould a final slap with the back of his spade threw a handful of wild flowers on the clay.

Rockleigh in the meantime picked out a shady tree, for the sun was hot, and waited patiently; then together they set out on the homeward track. It was near sundown when they approached the hospital.

"I'll leave you here." It was at a turn-off about half a mile distant from Sammy Ah Kong's humpy. "Make yourself at home till I return. I have a call to make. Ghool Singh will have dinner ready."

"Thanks, Doctor. But if you really don't mind, I'll just pick up poor Merton's belongings and drive on to the port."

"You'll stay over night, surely? I'll drive you in myself to-morrow and send back the trap you came by."

"Thanks. I'll find some way of returning it from the port. Thanks again, but I'd rather not; in fact, I couldn't—I couldn't stand it, really. Thank you all the same."

Barlow spoke rapidly, effusively, fearful lest he should be weakly overcome and have to spend another night in the place.

"Well, if you are determined!—you are welcome if you like to stay, though it is a dull hole."

Barlow thanked him many times, wishing he would go away to his call.

The Doctor shook hands, and Barlow was about to drive away when the former called to him—

"Oh, one moment! I nearly forgot. I have written you out a duplicate certificate of death. The original goes on, of course, to the Registrar. Thought it might be useful. Here it is." He withdrew it from his pocket-book and

handed it to him. "Good-bye again. Glad to see you any time you are up this way."

"Good-bye, Doctor," and Barlow drove ahead.

Rockleigh returned to the humpy. When he left it about an hour later the rudely-furnished bed-chamber was permeated with the sickly sweet odour of chloroform, and Merton was recovering from the stupor induced by the anæsthetic, deadly sick and with throbbing head. One side of his face was out of all keeping with the other, the corner of the mouth sagging, the lid of the eye half-closed. Rockleigh had severed the facial nerve to divert recognition. The operation left only a minute incision in the flesh, but wrought a complete—a repulsive change.

Even Ah Kong, when he entered the room after the Doctor's departure and in the closing light held a lamp above the patient, was moved out of his customary stoicism to an exclamation of sympathy.

"Welly sick man! Hai ya!"

The following morning before breakfast Rockleigh was there again. He visited the patient at least twice a day for the next three days, bringing all the resources of his skill to bear on his recovery; and recover he did, winning back strength as it were breath by breath.

A fortnight later he was permitted to sit out of doors under the shelter of the bark-covered structure that did duty as a verandah. It looked down the slope of cleared ground to Ah Kong's garden on the river flat. Since the patient had been placed under his care he had handed over the direct control of the work to one of his numerous cousins. He personally stimulated its progress by a general surveillance from the door of the humpy, occasionally making a skirmish with a long bamboo, which he threatened with many minatory gestures to apply to the legs of the

half-dozen "Chows" who were held to him in some form of bondage. They lived in a crazy tenement constructed of bark and kerosene tins.

Merton gazed on the scene listlessly.

Ah Kong invited him to conversation. "Allee same talkee, talkee?" he inquired solicitously from the silent man.

But speech came back slowly to Merton. He said little, and even of that little not all was coherent.

Rockleigh during his later visits endeavoured to draw speech from him; but with no great success. He would utter two or three words mechanically, then hesitate, pause, and finally lapse silently into a kind of animal-like stupor.

The Doctor watched the progress of his patient with keen professional interest, gradually recognizing the amount of injury his brain had sustained—the extent of the hemorrhage—and localizing it.

"Broca's convolution, for a certainty!" he said to himself.

Merton would begin life again almost as a child, without memory of the past, or with but a dim blurred vision of it, saving from its wreckage only a few isolated words and disjointed phrases—scant capital for a start in the new life on whose threshold he stood.

Six weeks passed before he could express himself with a fair degree of lucidity. Even then his diction was of the simplest, and with odd breaks in the continuity of speech. On the other hand his physical strength progressed rapidly, and soon he was capable, had he exerted himself, of undertaking some of the domestic duties that fell to Ah Kong's lot.

One day during Rockleigh's visit Merton abruptly asked him—

"Who am I?"

"Who are you?" repeated Rockleigh, looking at him with interest.

"Yes! What's my name?"

"Don't you remember?"

He shook his head. "Sometimes I seem to be just going to remember, but it—it gets away. I must be some one. Who am I?"

"Try to think! Try!"

He sat forward and putting his head on his hands tried. The past escaped him. Odd disconnected pictures, vague and blurred, like the intermingled colours in a cloth that had run together in the washing, flitted through his mind. He sighed wearily and gave it up.

"It won't come back. Sometimes I think it is coming; then—then it all goes away." He lay back in the chair and stared ox-eyed at the sky.

"Suppose we call you 'Ishmael.'"

"Who's that?"

"Ishmael was an outcast. He was sent into the wilderness. He suffered hunger and thirst."

"Allee same no tucker, no dlink. Welly poor man, Iss-male, eh?" commented Ah Kong, who was present.

"Very poor."

"Ishmael!" repeated Merton slowly. "I—do—not—remember Ishmael;" and he puckered his brow in the vain endeavour to recall the name. "It will do for a name—anything will do, I suppose."

Later the Doctor again tested him. "Has anything in your past life come back to you yet? Can you remember a large city—lots of houses you know, lots of them?"

"Sometimes I seem to see quite a lot of houses together; but it just comes and goes."

So it went on, the dulled brain vainly endeavouring to get back the past.

"Iss-male welly la-zee man!" expostulated Ah Kong one day. "He sleepee, sleepee. Iss-male no savee plenty workee. No workee, no chow-chow, eh?"

"Give him tucker for a few days more, Ah Kong, then Ishmael will go into the wilderness. He won't trouble us any more, poor devil!"

A few days later the doctor came round in his trap and took Ishmael to the port. There he fitted him out with a brand-new bluey—it looked aggressively so for a swaggie—a billy also painfully new, and the equipment in detail of one who "goes on the wallaby."

A coasting boat was leaving for the South that day. Rockleigh took a passage for him to Brisbane.

"Perhaps you may pick up a job there. Here are five pounds for you," and he put a frowsy note of the local currency in his hand. "Make the most of it, Ishmael. It is to you what Hagar was to that other Ishmael long ago. Money is mother, father, children and brethren, so long as it lasts. That was the philosophy of a man I knew—he's dead. Hang on to it. Good-bye—keep off drink, work in the open, work till you drop asleep from sheer weariness, and some day, Ishmael—who knows?—you may come out of the wilderness—and have learnt something not in that other man's philosophy."

Ishmael listened with apathetic submission and but half comprehension.

The last bag of sugar was dumped into the hold, the hatches were closed down, the lines cast off from the cobra-eaten piles. The little steamer, churning up the mud at the shallow bottom of Alligator Creek, steamed down the devious waterway, in and out, by the oozy roots of the mangroves that marked the banks of the stream, till at last

it reached the wide-spreading mouth; there it bumped full-steam-ahead over the sandy bar into the open sea-way and headed southward.

"'Some day' is 'yesterday,'" said Rockleigh to himself as he turned away, "and for Ishmael there remains 'to-morrow.'"

CHAPTER VIII

BARLOW, on his journey down the coast, over-estimated the effect of the announcement of his father's death on Geoffrey Merton. The many years of absence from the immediate control of his father, since on the mother's death and the break-up of the home he had been placed with his aunts, had weakened the bond of natural affection between them. The greater part of Geoffrey's knowledge of his father was gleaned from the lengthy letters he received from him. Now and again, as business permitted, the father paid a hasty visit to his son, but the real link between them was the weekly letter.

Merton, the father, used these communications as an outlet for that didactic impulse which, in less or greater degree, is common to all men. From them Geoffrey learned more of his father's views of life, its ultimate point and how to gain it, than probably he would have done had they lived under the one roof. They were forceful letters, written with the vigour of one who is convinced of his point of view—to the exclusion of all other points of view: the spirit that makes the fanatic a force to be reckoned with. At first they were a little above the lad's head, but he stored them all, and reading them again and yet again in the fuller light of later years, made them his gospel of life.

The announcement of his father's death came to him, therefore, with no close personal note.

There was no sense of a loss in his immediate life—but

of an outer influence removed from it. Barlow, not clearly apprehending this, thought the lad's reception of the news almost callous.

In Geoffrey's case the emotional element of affection had never been openly manifested toward him. No doubt it underlay the father's life. As Barlow had said, Geoffrey was the apple of his eye; but Merton was not a man who wore his heart upon his sleeve. He hid his affection even from his son's eyes. So Merton's death left them dry.

Barlow, noting the absence of a grief he associated with the loss of one so near to the lad by the tie of blood, felt the less compunction in telling him the revelation made to him on that long-remembered night in the Doctor's bungalow.

"There is something else, Geoffrey."

"Yes?" he inquired calmly.

"You know very little of your father's business?"

"He never spoke to me about his business affairs. Of course I knew that he was rich; at least I always thought he was rich—very rich." He looked at Barlow with searching eyes.

"Your father could make money, Geoffrey. He made it as a matter of fact—made a great fortune; but he could not rest there."

Geoffrey nodded with understanding. "Wanted to make more?"

"Yes. He wanted more. To have it was not sufficient for him. To sit down and spend! He could never do that. Making money becomes a lust, Geoffrey, a lust that survives all other passions."

"Well? Well?"—impatiently.

"Your father became wearied with the slow accretion of legitimate business gains. The fever was in his blood. He got off the straight slow way, tried a corner and held it,

tried another and got left, bought scrip—mining stock, you know—did well for a little while, then got left again."

"Sum it up, Mr. Barlow. Never mind the story. What does it all come to?"

"You've got to make a fight of it, Geoffrey. He left you everything he had, and that I'm afraid will be practically nothing. I'm sorry, Geoff—very sorry!"

Geoffrey sat down with pale face. He had not expected this. What a queer twist in things that his father, who was so worldly wise, so coldly calculating, should be—such an arrant fool!

"His last words to you, and you are the only child he had, the only creature he loved, were to"— Barlow hesitated to put the message in its bald terse form—"to hope, never to despair, but to work on like the strong son he pictured you would be, and in the end you would succeed, would reach the top."

"The top or nothing. He said that; I'm sure he said that. He said it in his letters a dozen times. And to think—just to think he could be such an ass!"

Barlow closed the interview abruptly. To him there was something repulsive in Geoffrey's attitude to the memory of the dead man: the sweeping condemnation—well, that came of youth, but the cold-blooded absence of all affection—that was unnatural.

"That is all I have to say, Geoffrey, except, perhaps, this. You are a youngster, and I—well, I'm over the hill, well over it. And you may take my word for it, it isn't safe for a man to judge another; the other man's sin of to-day may be one's own of to-morrow. Wait till you're a little older before you sit in judgment, Geoffrey, and then, perhaps, when you're older, you'll give up the judgment-seat to others. Remember that what you are, well fed, well clothed, well educated, your father made you."

Geoffrey rose and turned awkwardly to him, speaking with obvious difficulty.

"You're right, sir. I'm—I'm a beastly prig. He was my father. I owed everything to him."

Barlow held out his hand silently, and the other took it.

When the affairs of Rockleigh, Merton and Company came to be investigated it was found that they were so hopelessly involved that no other course but liquidation was open. For a few days the collapse of the house, that for many years had held so high a place in the city, was the chief topic in commercial circles. Then the news of an advance in the price of wool turned the current, and in a few weeks, outside the circle of depressed creditors, the affair, as a subject of conversation, became flat and stale.

It was fortunate for Geoffrey, who received only a few pounds out of the estate, that he had been articled to Barlow, and was at the completion of his articles. It had been his father's intention that he should some day take his place at the head of the firm; the immediate object in articling him to Barlow being that he might have the advantage of a legal equipment in the subsequent work of the business. Merton had the not uncommon conviction among laymen that "the law" was the fine art of overreaching one's fellows.

When, a few months after the affairs of the late firm had passed into the hands of the liquidator, Geoffrey completed his articles, Barlow fulfilled his promise to the father that he would look after him by offering him a partnership in the firm, which henceforth became "Barlow and Merton."

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CHAPTER IX

THE unkempt beard could not hide wholly his distorted features; iron-grey hair, dusty and tangled, reached almost to his shoulders: the rolled sleeves of his shirt showed arms burnt brown by the sun. His hands were horned and scarred, the nails broken and disfigured. The world had gone ill with Ishmael. In Brisbane, his little capital exhausted, he had lived the life of a dog—not the well-fed dog in the back yard of the prosperous citizen, but the masterless dog who skulks along the lanes and alleys at midnight, nosing in the rubbish-boxes for the wherewithal to live. Other men had some useful craft, some marketable skill to help them to a livelihood; he had but ten useless fingers, two hands that could not deftly use a tool, sinews slackened by years of inertia. Hunger, that great compeller, thrust bodily labour on him, and he worked painfully at the lowliest tasks. He learnt to cut grass with a sheep shears; with a thankful heart he cleaned up fowl-yards for "a bob and a meal." He even essayed the higher duties of gardening, escaping at nightfall when his ravages were hidden from view. For two months he worked his way down the coast, part of the time on a timber ketch, her deck so piled with logs that it was almost level with the water. They knew no Plimsoll mark in those parts. He was drenched all day by sea spray, fed on "salt horse" and waxy potatoes, and when his watch was over, crawled for a few hours of sodden sleep into the

shelter of that noisome pit, the fo'castle. For a month he worked in a saw mill, rolling the long logs to the sawing bench, cuffed, sworn at, and meagrely paid. He got as far as the Tweed River, did a spell in the cane fields with Chinamen and Kanakas, then went again "on the wallaby."

He "padded the hoof" along rough tracks worn by the timber-getters' teams, with the bent back and the slouching gait of the swagsman, his sole belongings slung crosswise on his back; his greasy soft hat strung round with bits of cork on boot lace to keep away the flies that compassed him like a cloud by day, darting with devilish persistency at his bloodshot eyes.

He climbed a spur of the coastal range. The hills were covered with forest trees, the gullies dense with scrub almost impenetrable, fed by the deep leaf mould that overlay the detritus from the rocky uplands, swept there by the rains. If Ishmael had any soul for the beautiful—and he had not, for it was dead, rotted out by the struggle just to live, to fill oneself with food of a sort—if he had such a soul, the soul of the well-fed who is neither aweary nor athirst, it surely had rejoiced!

Was not this God's own country? Down below at the foot of the range were gullies starred with the outspread plumes of fern trees. Creeks flowing through the broken lights, glinting points of burnished silver, swept with a surface of glass to the edge of ebony rock. There they broke into a veil of spray, and fell with prismatic colours through the shafts of sunlight; till the basin with its fringe of ferns at the foot of the fall gathered it in again, only to let it loose that it might twine its way like a riband through the bracken and the flower-bearing undergrowth.

Along the track by the wayside were scarlet-berried bushes; on the ground, mingled with the russet leaves and the chocolate decay of fallen timber, lay damson-coloured

and peach-tinted fruit, as wooden as the overspreading trees from which they fell. Stag-horn and elk-horn ferns clung to the bark of the tall shafted trees; and, higher still, fringes of yellow-tasselled orchids peeped from their nests. The parasite fig set its mosaic of green leaves, with here and there a touch of orange and of madder, in the trunks of great forest trees. In time the delicate patines of the fig would expand into thick coarse leaves, the almost imperceptible tracery of stems develop into long, clinging, grasping arms; then the great tree would crumble into dust, whilst the parasite would send out long branches and bear acrid fruit. And not far distant from the parasite grew the tree which the timber-getters, with a borrowed diction, named "the maiden's blush"; its clusters of pink-and-white and golden-buttoned blossoms faced earthward as if to tantalize the sun. The ground beneath was powdered with its petals. Here, too, were the marari and the quandong trees. What schoolboy has not carved rude ornaments from the quandong-nut for the short-frocked lassie of his choice?

The bush at noonday was silent as the arched spaces of a cathedral. Nature took its siesta. Plodding along the lonely track, only the occasional fall of a dead branch, or it might be the booming note of a wonga-wonga pigeon, broke the sense of solitude. Earlier in the day the purple-feathered breast of the rifle-bird had glinted in the sunlight with a metallic lustre of green and gold; blue-black regent birds, crowned with orange, had fed on the fruit of the wild raspberry, as innocent of flavour as the wooden pears were innocent of pulp. Here, also, the pink-crested dove, with silver throat and neck, had its feeding-place; and here, too, the many-coloured dragon bird sought out fat grubs in the moist decay that covered the ground as with a carpet.

It was on the evening of the third day in the ranges—

days of slow, hungry trudging—that Ishmael came upon the first clearing. It was carved out of the scrub-covered flat between two almost parallel spurs of the range. Down the further one the red track zigzagged its way towards the coast. A deep creek—that never wholly dried in drought time, as many creeks do—wound its way round the foot of the hills. A rude hut, slab-sided, bark-roofed, stood on a bit of rising ground back from the creek; a thin spiral of blue smoke rose from it—the ensign of a home. Ishmael noted it, blessed it, and stumbled on his way of pain with hope at his heart.

The clearing—in form a roughly rectangular block—was literally hewed out of the scrub. It was only partly cleared; beyond the house the ground was chequered with stumps and felled timber. The primeval timber and scrub closed it in, as if by high walls, from the outer world; the only means of communication being a track used by the timber-getters, which, following the course of the stream along the valley, eventually reached the township—as the public school, the store, the smithy, and a shanty that did an unlicensed trade in stimulants, were called.

Ishmael made his way to the house. There a woman met him. She looked him over with aversion, if not fear.

"Rations? No, we don't give rations. Don't you see we're only selectors; we ain't a station!" and she gave a short mirthless laugh. "If you like to wait till the kids' tea is over, perhaps there's something you may have."

He followed her with the dumbly expectant patience of the animal whose need is food, and whose whole being revolves round that one central primal fact.

He sat down at a respectful distance from the skillion, where the camp-oven with its smouldering ash gave out a pleasant glow.

Ishmael, who since he had left the river plantation had

fed sumptuously on a few scraps of discarded food he had appropriated on leaving the men's quarters, wondered as he sat on the sawn-off stump within smell of meat—it was a stew of some kind—what it would feel like just to be sure of one's meat every day. Think of it! Every day—every day!

He heard the clatter of knives and mugs, the treble voices of the children with nasal intonation. Now and then the voice of the woman who had spoken to him rose above the cheerful din—the good-tempered chatter—asking whether Betty had gathered the sticks, or Will had hobbled Nimble—he was a brute to get away was Nimble and the paddock was not fenced yet. He was an aged horse, once known on country racecourses; but long since humbled in spirit and resigned to menial duties. Presently she came to Ishmael with a pannikin of tea, a plate of stew, and a hunk of damper, thick and stodgy.

"There you are! It's all we can give you. Goin' on to the township to-night?"

He shook his head.

"Can't stay here," she said hastily. "We don't 'low strangers here. Township's only two miles on the track. Ned!"

Ned came out, a sturdy youth about eighteen years of age—younger than the woman, who was apparently twenty-one or more.

"Ned!"

"Yes, Ciss."

"He can't stay here, can he?"

"No; don't 'low no swaggies here."

"All right, boss," replied Ishmael wearily, "I'll move along by'm by."

He munched the damper and swallowed the strong, over-sweetened tea, prolonging the meal, for he was deadly

tired, and it was good also to look again on human faces after days of solitude.

Will and Betty, two younger folk, ten and seven years or thereabout respectively, joined the group and gazed on "swaggie" with an air of interest. He was from the outer world and might have some news. News was scarce in those parts.

"Where from?" queried Ned.

"Tweed last," answered Ishmael laconically.

"Where are you goin'—the Rivers?"

"Mebbe."

"Oh!" There wasn't much information in this man.

"Cane or corn?"

"Don't care which," replied Ishmael between bites, and in truth it was a matter of indifference to him; he was equally useless in either occupation.

Ned examined him critically; and after a pause remarked with youthful contempt born of youthful self-assurance—

"You don't look up to much, swaggie!"

"God's truth, I don't; can you give us a job, boss?"

"You're kiddin'. You don't want no job. You ain't the first swaggie we've had 'long here, you know. If the old man wasn't dead he'd have druv you off with the shot gun. You ain't the sort as wants jobs, you ain't. Now then, you've had some tucker, move along."

"Say, boss?"

"Well?"

"Give a man a show! Mebbe some day you'll be this way yourself.

"None of your cheek, swaggie! Get up an' gee—you won't get into the pub if you don't hurry up. You shan't stay here, that's straight." He laid his hand on him.

"Don't hurt him, Ned! He's gettin' old an' he looks sick like."

Ishmael, in his rags and dirt, rose from the stump and looked from one to the other with glazed pathetic eyes, the eyes of the dog, outcast, reviled and stoned.

"My God! this ain't much of a world for blokes who ain't young and rich and fat. This is a Christian world ain't it?" he said, turning with sudden fierceness on the young man.

"Y—e—s, I s'pose so," replied Ned, taken aback.

"'Course it is!" and the woman caught him up quickly.

"You lie! It ain't a Christian world!" and Ishmael lifted up his head and squared his shoulders in defiance.

"Let Him strike me dead if He likes. It's all a lie. It ain't a Christian world. Where's your mercy, where's your justice—where's your brotherly love—brotherly love, I'm damned!" and Ishmael laughed ironically. "It sounds nice on Sunday, don't it—'brotherly love,' 'Dearly beloved brethren.' Oh my!" And again he laughed so fiercely and so loudly that they drew away from him as if from a madman.

"Ain't we give you some tucker?" queried Ned doggedly. "Do you 'spect us to hand over the house an' s'lection? What more do you want?"

"Look here, boss. You've some one to talk to, you've got a home, you have. You ain't a homeless dog of a swaggie, you ain't on the wallaby weeks at a time, then a bit of work, mebbe, then a bust and blue it all. No, I don't drink! It ain't because I don't want to. Drink! why drink's the only bit of heaven comes our way. I've tried hard to keep off it, boss, I have, so help me God, I have!—and it can't go on for ever—you can't fight against it for ever, boss. Once, just once, up the Tweed I had a real, red bust and I keep on trying to forget it, and I can't.

Seems I must get back to it. That night, boss, I was a man, a great man, a King; I was rich, I had a home, I had kids —I wasn't a blarsted swaggie on the track no longer. They chucked me out, an' I lay there for half a day with my nose in the dust; the skeeters bit me, an' the ants bit me, an' I might have died for all any one cared, but I didn't mind, for I was dead—dead drunk, an' happy."

"You go inside, Ciss, an' take the kids—he's a bit barmy. Get along inside! D'you hear?"

They went inside, a scared little group, one at either side of the woman.

"Boss, give me a show! For the love of God give me a chance! Just put me on for a week an' try me. Take me for what I'm worth. It ain't much, I know; but I want to make a do of something; it's in me somewhere if I can only get a chance. Surely, boss, it's in us all somewhere if we only had the chance."

Indoors Ciss was putting the children to bed and hearing their prayers. Betty, who had a quaint little custom of adding to her petition the pup, "Cockie," and Nimble, and as occasion arose other humble friends, added to-night "Pray God bless swaggie."

Ciss heard it and was troubled. Was it really a Christian world after all, just to say it and not help God to do something—not bother any more? Swaggie was something like the dead father in a way. He was grizzled and had the same desperate look of one who was always fighting and always being "licked." When Betty rose she tucked her hurriedly in the bunk and went outside.

"Ned, I want you!"

"Well, what d'you mean by com'n' out?" Ned felt that his command was being trifled with.

"Come here!" She took him aside.

"We'll take him on, Ned," she said hurriedly, eagerly.

CHAPTER X

THEY were back from the township, Ishmael, Ciss and the two children, with Nimble who had borne them there in a borrowed trap. The neighbours who had accompanied them had turned off here and there from the main track, leaving them at last alone.

They made a sombre little group, each member wearing some symbol of mourning; Ciss, an ill-fitting dress of some cheap black material hastily run together; Ishmael, a wisp of crape round his billycock hat.

Ned was dead. Ned the bright-eyed, the valiant, the cock-sure: Ned who had toiled all day clearing scrub, stumping, planting, getting in the milkers, fencing, digging post-holes, doing the duties without end of the settler on the land.

Two days ago Ishmael in the early morning had brought him home crushed to death by a falling tree. He and Ishmael had been clearing. In the customary way they had cut a path through the vines and underwood. In the tangle of moist growth, stinging-nettle trees, the thorns of the vines, mosquitoes and leeches stung them, tore them, sucked their blood; but Ned said it was nothing, and Ishmael became infected with his spirit. They would clear the block, or die. They nicked the smaller timber round a huge monarch of trees and then attacked the giant himself. He was a tough old ironbark that tried the edge of their

axes. All day long Ciss up at the house, a good half mile away or more, could hear the click, click of the axes. She could distinguish with the keen ear of the bush-woman the one from the other. "There was more life," she said, "in Ned's." The day before his death Ned had left the tree ready to fall on the following morning. It had been cut with due judgment as to the direction in which it should lie, so that it might bring down with it the nicked timber in its vicinity. Early next morning before breakfast they were again at work. To Ned the experienced was left the duty of cutting through the remaining wood.

Ishmael stood beyond the radius of timber that would be affected by the fall. Click! click! went the axe with regular, swinging stroke. Ishmael, watching the tree, saw it sway, but Ned tarried to give one final blow in the wedge-shaped cut. The tree cracked and angled over.

"Run! Run!" cried Ishmael, and Ned sped hot-footed for safety. He was well out of reach of the falling tree itself, but still within the area of smaller timber that would be compassed in the fall. He stopped, and with keen apprehensive eye watched the tree tops near him. Then he knew no more. A limb from a neighbouring tree —little more than a sapling—struck him full in the chest and crushed it at a blow. It was the scrub in its death agony.

When he could with safety enter the tangle of vines and fallen timber, Ishmael cut a way to the body. There was a flutter in the heart as he placed his ear over the crushed-in chest, the flutter of a bird escaping. He wiped away the blood-tinged froth from the young lips and thought he caught a murmur, "the kids!"

"If I didn't really hear it then it was what he would 'a-said," he afterwards explained; "it was always the kids with him."

It was a tough job to get the dead body out of the tangle to the cleared land, but at length he accomplished it. Then he carried it home on his back.

Ciss heard the crash of the falling timber and went out on the earth-beaten verandah to see the hole that Ned and Ishmael had made in the scrub. Then she returned to her household work, lighter in heart. They were doing it after all and clearing the land—"making a job of it." Some day they would have the corn growing out there. Some day they would have money in the bank; some day she and Ned would have a holiday, and go to Sydney and see the world. She sang to herself as she moved about the little home, dreaming the dream of "some day." And as she sang, Ishmael came home with his burden.

Out in the clearing where he went, leaving her with her dead, he could hear her cries. He wandered on aimlessly till he reached the creek, but still he could hear her calling the dead back to them.

"Ned! Ned! oh, Ned!" And Ishmael, stumbling along blindly, wondered in his heart at the ways of God; that he, the outcast, the homeless, should be spared, and Ned, the stay of these young lives, be taken. But he could not think hard enough to shut out the awful cries up there at the house.

They had laid him to rest—Ned, the lovable, the valiant of heart, the hopeful, sleeping the long sleep in the little cemetery.

The white-faced woman with the work-worn hands, so young in years, so laden with the world's burden of labour and sorrow, looked up at Ishmael with hopeless eyes. A woman's hands could not clear that awful scrub, a woman's hands could not fence and plough, sow and reap, cook and wash, make and mend for the children, see that they were clean and tidy, help them with their books—poor young

soul! She was not a crying woman, a petted city woman, who having all but one small desire fulfilled, wept her heart out for the trifle lacking. She was a brave, golden-hearted woman of the soil, near God and Nature, but the greatness of the task she had to face single-handed broke her down. Ciss wept in dry, hard sobs, for they cost her much.

"What shall we do, Ishmael—oh! what shall we do? He said we must try, Ned and me, to carry it through for the kiddies. He said to us when he was dyin', 'Make a job of it, Ned; an' you, Ciss, look after the children an' make 'em keep to their books.' I wish we could all die together, for I can't do it all, Ishmael, however much I try."

She sat down on the wooden bench on the verandah, and, leaning forward, buried her face in her hands. Will and Betty tried to comfort her, the lad putting his arm around her and offering to do this and that, saying that he would soon be a man and able to work for her. Betty nestled to her side on the earthen floor and cried into her skirt.

Ishmael stood there stolidly, mechanically rubbing Nimble's soft nose—he had yet to take home the borrowed trap.

There was no coherency in his thoughts. They drifted back on the old "graft," on the coast, on the Tweed. Days of monotonous labour, nights of animal sleep, without interest, without hope, till he came down the track that afternoon and reached this little clearing in the bush to find a home. Well, to-morrow he would go on the wallaby again; and these he would leave behind him. God help them! What would become of them? Drift apart, one to the north, another to the south. Ciss would go into service somewhere, he supposed; someone would put a firestick into the hut, perhaps, and so end it all. The world seemed mostly making and breaking.

Far across the half-cleared land he could hear the breeze in the scrub, the rustling of the leaves; it was the cool breath of the south coming up. It struck his face, and new life came to him.

He stood for a moment motionless, then, baring his head, let the cool breeze play through his long, unclipped hair. Nimble, missing the mechanical rub, rub, raised his head and muzzled against his cheek.

Then Ishmael went to the woman; and she looked up into his eyes and saw a true light there.

Great words lay on Ishmael's lips unsaid. His words were few, halting, but half coherent.

"We'll pull it through—you an' me an' the kids. By God, we will!" And his Maker understood the oath.

So daily Ishmael went out to fight the scrub, thinking neither of reward nor self, with but one fixed thought—to win through for the sake of the weak and helpless.

One night Ciss sat at the rough pine table, bending over a task. Ishmael was smoking his evening pipe, seated on the sawn block by the fireside, where the dead selector had sat. The girl was absorbed in her work, her elbows squared, her brows knitted. She was not writing a lengthy document, but it appeared to need much biting of the end of the pen, and a great expenditure of ink. At length it was finished and she raised her head.

"We must all sign it," she said gravely. This was business of moment. "First, you an' me, Ishmael, then Will an' Betty. Listen, kiddies. This is a partnership, this is."

"It's writin'," remarked Will, who, mindful of the difficulties of acquisition, held all written matter in profound respect.

"It means," said Ciss, seized with the importance of the occasion, "it means we're all goin' to work together, and whack everything. Ain't we, Ishmael?"

Ishmael nodded his head gravely.

"So help us, God!" she added solemnly. The phrase, picked up from the weekly newspaper, had in her mind some vague association with a binding force in law.

"Help us, God!" chorused the children, as if it were the "Amen" to a prayer.

Then Ciss squared her elbows once again and signed the paper "Celia Heron."

"Heron ain't my real name; it's my 'dopted one. But it's all right, ain't it, Ishmael?"

Ishmael assented, and, rising from his seat, took the pen in his big clumsy fingers. He wished they did not make pens so small.

Ciss examined the signature doubtfully.

"There seems to be somethin' funny 'bout just Ishmael, don't there? Ain't you got any other name?"

He had seated himself again, and pulled at his pipe for some seconds before replying.

"Well, I ought to have, oughtn't I?" he answered at length, dubiously. "S'pose I had once; but I've clean forgot it;" and he leant his head on his hand in thought.

"Was you christened?"

"Perhaps I was; but I've clean forgot that, too."

"Nobody remembers their christenin'; but you might remember your name. You just try again. Try the letters like—A for Adam, B for Benjamin. It ain't X or Z, unless you're a furriner. You ain't a furriner, Ishmael?"

"Maybe, or maybe not, I can't remember," said Ishmael. with the simplicity of a child.

"X for Ximenes, Z for zebra," intoned Will. "What's a Ximenes, Ciss?"

"You hold your tongue. Me and Ishmael's doin' business. Well, you see, you can t be just Ishmael. You

must be Ishmael somethin', or somethin' Ishmael. Just try again."

And once more he tried vainly.

"I can't. Sometimes I seem to remember things—things like what you read in the newspaper, you know, an' about streets, houses, shops; big places, with lots of goods. Sometimes," and he sighed despondently, "I seem to have known all about that sort of thing."

"Don't you remember when you was a kiddie?"

He shook his head.

"Father or mother?"

"Must have had 'em, of course."

"It takes a lot of patience with you, Ishmael, don't it?" remarked Ciss despairingly. "I never seen a man forget so much as you do."

"You are very patient, Ciss."

"Does seem queer though to forget all you do. Was you ever regular barmy—real barmy?"

"Somethin' must have happened. I was ill. S'pose it happened then."

"Perhaps that was when—when your face was changed."

It was the first time she had referred to his disfigurement—disregarding it with an innate refinement of sympathy. Now that his beard and moustache had grown long it was less apparent than it had been, though still noticeable in the drooping eyelid and the down-drawn corner of the mouth.

"Yes, I suppose so. I'd like to know what lies behind it all. I wonder who I am! Not, perhaps, that it matters much; but a man likes to know what he was."

"Well, you know who you are now; that's some comfort!" said Ciss consolingly. "But you must have another name. It ain't right to have only one name. It ain't Christian. It makes folks talk. Some people have

ever so many. Crowned heads like the Queen and Albert Edward have piles of 'em—but only one, nobody has only one!"

"How would Brown do?" he queried.

"Brown's common—awful common—you could run 'em six to the acre;" and she shook her head decisively. "When you can pick your own name I'd have a good 'un if I was you."

"Bartholomew!" proposed Ishmael, still bent on exhausting letter B.

"What are you givin' us? Never heard of him. It's outlandish! What you want is somethin' tasty, somethin genteel. Where would you put the name, front or back?"

"Oh, it don't matter."

"Well, I'd try somethin' I was sure of, if I were you. How'd you like Unit?"

"What?"

"Unit. Betty, you give me last week's paper."

Having got it she read: "In the long run it is the individual units that tell." They must be very choice people them Units. I'd try Unit if I was you. It ain't a bit common, an' perhaps there's luck in it, 'cording to the paper."

"Very well. Say Ishmael Unit;" and he rose and added the name to his signature.

"What's funny to me, Ishmael, is why you don't forget everythin', but only somethin'. If you forget your real name, why don't you forget readin' an' writin'?"

"Can't tell you, Ciss. After I was sick the Doctor told me that perhaps some day it would all come back. Perhaps so. I keep hopin' it will."

"If it's anythin' good, Ishmael, I hope it will—not if it ain't—best forgot, isn't it?"

"Anyway Unit will do till then."

"Now you, Will an' Betty, listen while I read, an' then sign your names, an' don't you forget when you've growed up that this is a partnership-like on your Bible oath." Then she read—

"This is to say we are all partners in the selection, in the house, in Nimble, in the cows, Spotty, Daisy, and Nellie, and in the poddies, and in everything we have now and for evermore."

Will's name took up a great deal of space, the heavy down strokes, light upstrokes, and the dotting of all "i's" being scrupulously attended to. Betty's hand was guided across the page by her sister's.

Thus Ishmael was formally admitted into a partnership that without legal formality was observed to the letter, till, in later days, a man learned in the law put all in order.

CHAPTER XI

ISHMAEL'S first season was a busy one. He worked on the land from sunrise to sunset—for time was precious to him. A few more years, and age would begin to tell. The best years of his life—best in the physical sense—lay behind him. His hair and beard were streaked with grey, but he had never known health before—health as he now realized it; and with it came a buoyancy of spirit, a new sense of satisfaction in the act of living. Daily he came closer in touch with elementary things, learned love of his father the sun who bred life, of his mother the earth who bore fruit, of his sister the wind who fanned on his cheeks and sang in the trees. He knew the fragrance of the freshly upturned soil, the incense of the gums after the rain. His eyes saw the world of things about him harmonized by the common gift of life with his own.

To the few neighbours who from time to time had visited them on Sunday, the one partially free day of the week, he had been simply "Old Ishmael," the broken-down drudge, the derelict "swaggie." When Ned died they speculated on what oddments they might pick up cheap at the sale. The resolution to face the fight with Ishmael in command moved them to derision. How could he hope to take the place of the active, strong-thewed youth, and they asked, with a string of crudely descriptive adjectives, what did he know of corn-growing?

Ishmael at labour became an object of curiosity to

them. He was rarely without a neighbour perched on the top rail of the bit of fencing near the house, smoking, expectorating, and full of gratuitous advice. He took it all in good humour and never turned from his purpose; in the well-thumbed lexicon of Ishmael's life there was "no such word as fail." He knew mighty little of this business, as his neighbours said, but he meant to know a deal. Hugh Merton was not wholly dead in him, the indomitable purpose still survived, but with a new ideal. By degrees the attitude of contemptuous tolerance towards him drifted into one nearer friendliness, and grudgingly it was admitted that "after all the old bloke didn't do so bad."

He was shrewd at a bargain too, was Ishmael, and perhaps he won more respect from his fellows by the knowledge that "you couldn't take him down," than by all the sterling worth that underlay his daily toil. There were no signs of decadence under his management. Things even looked up. The air of order and tidiness about the hut and its surroundings simulated a certain affluence. "Them Herons is gettin' on," said a neighbour, returning to the bosom of his family from a half-day wasted on the perch on the fence. "Old Ishmael wasn't born yesterday! He's got Jews' blood in him by the name, I should say." And in all times the Jew has been a man to reckon with.

It was not skill in or knowledge of his work that brought him success in these first days, but drudgery—that "grey nurse." Often through want of either he expended twofold the labour one more experienced would have spent in accomplishing the same end. But he was observant—inquiring, and, above all, had the courage of initiative. As the men grew to respect him for his capacity for looking after his interests, so the women liked him for his devotion to hard work—in which many of their lords were not so gifted—and especially for his loyalty to the little stranded family.

He was neighbourly, too, and ready to lend a hand in an emergency. And if he sowed in this way, so also he reaped; for in slack times they gave him a hand, cross-cutting the huge, half-charred logs that cumbered his land; or when the corn came up lending a hand with the chipping.

In a patch of cleared land that had been partially burned off, Ned before his death had put in a little crop; and now Ishmael increased the area, sowing even among the stumps. He had watched Ned sow, and put his knowledge to the test. There was the maize—locally known as corn—an abbreviation of "Indian Corn"—soaking in the bucket. Out of a piece of sacking he made a pouch or pocket to sling before him. Filling it with the moist grains, hoe in hand, he started on his first row down to the creek. It was not a straight row by any means, and the neighbours exhausted much rude chaff on him; for in the straightness of his row is the pride of the farmer. At as equal spaces as he could roughly guess he dug the hoe, and into the little pocket in the soil thus made he dropped four grains of corn; then, withdrawing the hoe, let the earth cover up the seed of the future crop. So on, wavy row after wavy row, till the available space was sown.

The close of the winter drifted into spring, the corn came up in green tender shoots. The sun rose earlier; so did Ishmael. Soon all the land, that in occupation of the scrub more richly than the rest, dressed itself in new garments; the trees and bush flowers began to bud, the very air seemed tremulous in birth giving.

Spring ripened and the wattles burst into bloom. One morning, the dew heavy on the grass, the sun throwing a quiverful of golden arrows across the clearing, Ishmael stood in the open, bareheaded, his throat free—stood there drinking in the fresh morning air, his own man! The

notes of the scrub birds were in his ears, the faint perfume of the wattles in his nostrils. He was happy. How simple it was, God's happiness, so near at hand, so good a thing! Ciss called to him, "Ishmael! come here, I want you!" The children waking from their sleep asked, "Where's Ishmael?" His life was intertwined with theirs; he was their rock—their stay. So some one had wanted him after all; there was a place for him! God had not made him for nothing.

When summer came and the corn was ripe, he massed his little gang of workers—Ciss, Will and Betty—the children being home from school. Together they did the pulling. Drawing down the tall stalks, Ciss and he broke off the cobs and the children carried them to the heap. When, late in the afternoon, Ciss went home to cook their meal, he gathered the long, tasselled cobs from the heaps into a sack, and by climbing and hauling over the fallen timber dragged it home. Then he returned for another sackful, and so on. Before the summer closed the bark humpy he had built as a primitive barn was as full of cobs as it could hold.

He had turned up a space near the house for a kitchen-garden. Ciss did the rest. She rose with the birds to do her planting and weeding. It did not take long for the pumpkins and watermelons to spread their great succulent leaves and hairy stalks over the ground. The yellow blossoms gave place to green marbles, developing under the warm sun into big mottled-melons or rough-skinned pumpkins. Soon the roof of the barn was covered with these products of her garden, and lay there basking in the sun till it came to the turn of each to be consumed. She grew peas and beans, potatoes and cabbages. When there was a spell of dry weather she would carry can after can of water from the creek to moisten the soil about her

plants. The can itself was but a discarded kerosene-tin, with a bit of fencing-wire for a handle.

It was Ciss, also, who ground the corn in a rude mill to make the meal for their breakfast porridge. There was good simple fare and sufficient of it. The storekeeper had trusted the family in the past and did not withdraw his confidence. Sweet corn boiled with the salt beef made a good wholesome dish. Into Betty's hands the charge of the poultry was given. She loved her turkeys as William of old loved the great red deer. They wandered all over the place and it was a daily injunction to her on her excursions after the errant birds "to mind the snakes."

It was Will who rounded up the milkers—before setting out for school. Ciss made butter in an old-fashioned churn, and cooked damper and soda bread in the camp-oven. Her suet dumplings and "spotted dog" were beyond description. There was a never-ending round of tasks for all of them.

The monotony of the life, its remoteness from all exterior sources of interest would have been almost unendurable to the city-bred man or woman, in whom mental activity is developed to the confines of disease; but to these slower, lethargic natures, drawing in a full breath of physical life, it was normal existence and had its share of pleasures.

Summer over, planting time had to be thought of; then there was the husking of corn from the late harvest. Husking for the most part was done at night and all took a hand in it.

Ishmael some time before had purchased a concertina, and by sedulous practice in odd moments had mastered a number of tunes. His fame as a player went abroad, and Nimble, with Ciss on his back and Ishmael on foot at her side, covered many a mile of corduroy road to make music

at homely bush dances. The children brought home some simple school songs, and to their treble voices Ishmael added his own deep bass.

So, as they husked the corn they sang in the dim light of the oil lamp, or if the night were fine and still they would build a fire in the open and gather round it. At odd times neighbours joined them or sat on the fence smoking. The attempts at music, perhaps from some remote association with sackbut and psaltery, convinced them still more that there was Jewish blood in Ishmael.

Then came the threshing, for the due accomplishment of which a neighbour lent a hand-machine. Ishmael worked at the handle with all the endurance of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Ciss fed the ancient labour-making machine; Will kept its feed-box full; and Betty looked after the corn as it was stripped from the cobs, rubbing off the odd grains that still adhered to them.

Finally when the crop was bagged Ishmael borrowed a cart and harness and, with Nimble in the shafts, went to and from the river, as far up as the steamer came, where there was a rude staging at which to ship the local produce.

In due time came settling-up, when Ishmael cashed the cheque at the store, clearing off the outstanding account and leaving a balance in hand to meet the payments on the land, to buy some needed farming implements, and so on.

One day he and Ciss took a holiday. She patched up his clothes with odd scraps taken from where they could be spared in other garments, brushed him down with a new ti-tree broom, spruced herself up, and together they tramped early after breakfast to the township, where Ishmael opened a savings bank account in her name at the store where the post-office did its business. There also they purchased some presents for the children, and Ishmael insisted on something "tasty" for herself. She cast fond eyes on some

brilliant attire, but with a self-denial that cost her more than mere man dreams of set her thoughts with a sigh to "somethin' useful."

They had a tin of salmon and a loaf of baker's bread from the store as the nucleus of a feast. Bearing these dainties they retired to the river, and with the steamer in view—the same steamer that had taken their corn to Sydney—boiled the billy and spread the feast.

The sun was hot, the flies were bad and the track home long and dusty; but it was a holiday, a festival, something to think of, to talk of in the days that were so like each unto the other.

BOOK II

THE CROP

CHAPTER I

THE "Hatter" sat at the door of his hut, the door being constructed of a flour bag branded "Snowflake," stretched on a sapling frame. He was smoking his evening pipe. The Hatter's home, perhaps a trifle roomier than Diogenes' tub, was built on a cutting in the hillside not far from the tunnel-mouth, beyond which, like a great white ant-heap, projected a pile of tailings.

Up there with the Hatter it was at the close of day very peaceful, very remote. Down below you could see the rows of twinkling lights springing up in the haze of oncoming night, marking the lines of streets in Golden City. At that distance the sounds of innumerable stampers, which ceased crushing out the quartz neither day nor night, blended into a continuous monotone. It had been all alluvial digging when the Hatter first saw the field in the early fifties, and the hill on the face of which he had built his home had been covered with dense forest—so dense that the hill looked black against the landscape; now it was treeless, and white with up-turned clay as snow-clad Hermon.

In those days he had not been "a hatter," the descriptive term for the isolated digger who "went upon his own"; but later on had drifted into this life of the lone-hand digger, partly from the want of luck, partly from an ingrained tendency that way.

The Hatter neither asked any man's pity nor did he need it. To him pity was for the folk down there in the hive, with the eternal riot of the stampers in their ears. In the days spent fossicking among the ranges he came near the heart of things. He was well past the prime of life; but to his thinking it was only in these later years he had begun to live it. The days of his youth had been red and riotous. He had blazed in the hell of the early Californian days, waxed rich and prodigal and been eaten up to the last dollar by the daughter of the horse-leech. He came through it flabby in body and soul, with a fine cynicism of life, thinking that he knew all it could tell him. Now the Hatter confessed with a cheerful candour that he was learning only a bit of it here and there. "What a chap knows about life amounts to nothin' 'side of what he don't know," was his way of expressing it. "Take it all round, it's like a bit of streaky bacon—bit of lean here, bit of fat there, an' no flavour in the durned thing 'less you've got both." He "reckoned" the folk down there in the city did not know everything and plumed himself on his philosophic attitude as one removed from men, who beholds from an altitude the scramble in the market-place.

When he was taken to task, as he sometimes was by self-constituted missionaries to "hatters" and other flotsam and jetsam of the gold-field, he would argue it out thus—

"Don't see anything in it, young man! To worry all the snap out of life just to pile up dollars that can't buy you anything worth the having—what's in it? I've been there

an' I've been left—left badly. Dooty? Whose dooty? 'Civilization?' Cuss civilization. What does it come to, anyhow? Go down there"—and he would point at the flat-spread city below—"an' see the show. That's civilization, is it? Well, I don't think much of it. 'Inventions!' Well, I'll chuck 'em in. Most inventions amount to doin' badly what Nature does well. Tryin' to get points on the Creator, that's what inventions are. 'Happiness of the human race?' That's pretty, that is—real pretty. 'Happiness of the human race!' 'Minds me when I was a boy an' wrote copies. Don't get much of it down there, mister," and again he indicated the city. "Too blamed 'fraid of the other chaps working points on you to go foolin' round with happiness. 'Beer?' Oh, you didn't say beer. That's a great invention, beer is. Mighty proud of it, eh? 'Comforts of life,' that's what you call 'em? An' I s'pose it's progress an' the arts an' such like to have more clothes than you want an' sweat in feather beds o' nights, wonderin' how you're goin' to pay for six chairs when Nature only lets you sit on one. It's all foolishness—durned foolishness. You've got a wrong hang of things, young man; turned off on the wrong track. Civilization that's worth a bean doesn't mean a pack of fool men an' women running their immortal boilers with a throttle on the safety valve, to turn out things that ain't of any account when you've got 'em. Hell's full-up of people who've never sat in the sun. No, mister, true civilization means getting the most out of life: but what chaps like you make it is getting the least out of it. You're the sort of chap who talks about giving the people cheap art and cheap literature, cheap furniture and pianos; an' what God gives them for nothing is just what they don't get—clean, fresh air, the sunlight, the trees, the grass, the sea, all that makes life worth living, my man. Meantime you let me alone. I've been ate up once an'

don't reckon on a second show. I've gone slick back to Nature. I can earn my bread by a reasonable amount of sweat that keeps the pores open an' healthy, an' I wouldn't swop with you or any of your crew. Good afternoon; it's about due for sunset. Don't you stay out; go right in an' turn on the gas. Keep your eyes skinned for the holes. This hill is just riddled with holes. I reckon civilization hasn't improved the original design—not much."

He was very mad—even for a hatter—and patronized Nature amazingly.

In the days before Cherry was in long frocks, and when Geoffrey was still in knickers, they often climbed the hill to the long tunnel that pierced it through. There was fascination in this tunnel to children with the natural love of adventure. To leave the bright sunlight at one mouth and follow the wooden rails on which the trucks ran, the space ahead blacker than any starless night, the square of light behind diminishing smaller and smaller, gave the excursion the fine flavour of adventure. Heavy upright timbers supported cross pieces that held up the roof. The clay walls were moist, and a current of damp air blowing through struck cold on the warmest day of summer. Midway, the point of light at the back was lost, and the adventurous two, hand in hand, went on in faith, their eyes piercing the gloom for the pin-prick of light that marked the first glimpse of the further end. A "coo-ee" echoed, re-echoed, and went rumbling down the long alley with a mysterious and delightfully awesome sound.

It was in the course of one of these holiday rambles that the two young people made the acquaintance of the Hatter.

He was extremely affable. As he said, he liked his human nature fresh from the mint. And it is just to him and the youngsters to add that they too liked the Hatter.

His hut resembled a ship's cabin; and the cuttings from the illustrated papers pasted against the slab-sided walls, reminding Cherry of her early home, drew her to the digger in a bond of sympathy.

Also the Hatter was lonely, or seemed to her to be so; and the loneliness of man—wandering like a lost sheep from the domestic fold—is in itself an appeal to the feminine heart, whether its owner be in short-skirts or long.

The Socratic method of imparting, or in this instance receiving, information by question and answer, comes naturally to children, unaware of the rebuffs that check their elders' interest in that particular form of human intercourse. It started by inquiry as to who made the tunnel, and why they—whoever made it—wanted to go through the hill instead of over it. The Hatter gave full replies so far as his knowledge went, and where it failed fell back on fiction.

Once the ice was broken, all future pilgrimages to the tunnel included a visit to the Hatter, and as these visits invariably fell upon a Saturday when, blessed surcease! there was no school, they generally found the Hatter prepared to dispense a limited but gracious hospitality.

Now the Hatter was a reader of imaginative literature, and was also by way of being a poet, his efforts being published in the "Poet's corner" of an evening newspaper. Nearly every Saturday's issue held a contribution either from his pen or that of "Soulful Sarah"—a local Sappho so misnamed by a Philistine public—who revelled in metrical descriptions of premature decay.

The Hatter, on the other hand, was nothing if he were not amorous in his verse, and cast back a century or so for models for his style—though how anyone but a hatter of the maddest order could expect "To Chloe eating an

apple" or "To Cynthia's shoe-string" to appeal to a mutton-eating, mining-scrip community passes understanding. "Soulful Sarah" occasionally struck a note of domestic sympathy in "The little angel wafted homeward" order of verse, but it is very doubtful if Chloe or Cynthia, Phyllis or Miranda ever secured sympathy at all. However, poets were not to be picked up every day in Golden City, and the editor of *The Evening Nugget* had a notion that the Hatter's "Prithees" and "Swains" and "Cupids" gave a literary flavour to his pages.

What little share of worldly fame drifted into the life of the Hatter came to him through this audience of two. Whether the youngsters really enjoyed the Hatter's recitals, or tolerated them for the sake of his Abernethy biscuits, they never confessed. In after life the memory of Chloe became inextricably mixed with carraway seeds.

But they did learn something from the lone-hand digger. He had a genuine love for the beautiful, nourished by the life he led, the long tramps through the ranges, the hours spent in the sunlight with the sweet scent of mimosa in the air, a carpet of wild flowers about his feet. He knew also much of what is best in our literature. As he read, the slipshod negligence of his speech disappeared and the voice attuned itself to the harmony of the lines. It was the one side of his nature he had cared to polish. The haunting music of Milton's "Hymn of the Nativity," first heard by her from the Hatter's lips, as the three sat at the door of his cabin, the sun "curtain'd with cloudy red" sinking to rest, lived with Cherry in her quiet thoughts.

He read Shakespeare, and swore by him. Other folk on the field also swore by Shakespeare, but did not read him.

The Hatter would discourse thus on his hero. "He

pans out more to the dish than the whole caboodle of them. Maybe you're in bed and can't sleep, started thinkin', an' can't get off the track. S'pose you hit on a thought, an' say 'Gosh! that's a bit of God's truth,—well, like as not, you'll drop across it later on in William. Once upon a time I was partner with a man as laid out a cove—well, over a matter we ain't here to talk about—an' this cove, as he was heavin' up the ghost, seemed to go off his pannikin, and commenced to talk about trees and grass and that sort of thing, like as if he was walkin' in the country an' enjoyin' it for the first time. He was sort of sniffin' it all in when out he went—there were no more spring days for that cove. Struck me last night when I was reading, it's a sort of throw-back from civilization to Nature. William spotted it. I'll get it for you." He went indoors, and returned with a much-thumbed copy of a cheap reprint. "'Old Jack lay dyin,' and this is it—an' it's true, Cherry, true as death itself, 'for after I saw him fumble with the sheets and play with flowers and smile upon his fingers' ends, I knew there was but one way; for his nose was as sharp as a pen, and 'a babbled of green fields.' Only a few dozen words and there's a picture the chaps who write now couldn't do in half a dozen pages. He mints pure gold, does William. Watch a dog when he's off colour—and he goes for the grass. I had a pup died two months ago, an' he died muzzlin' at a tussock. Natural man and a dog, Cherry, get back to Nature in the last extremity. When they civilize all the grass out of 'em, then Armageddon's about due, you may reckon."

This and similar discourses set Cherry wondering what it was the Hatter wanted—and if he knew himself. Still she thought very highly of him, and one day contrived that he should descend from his shelf on the hill to be introduced to the aunts.

Aunt Felicia entertained him with a glass of alleged port—the Colonel, deceased, used to drink port—and some excellent seed-cake of her own making; and from that day forward he became a privileged visitor to the home.

CHAPTER II

THE firm of Barlow and Merton flourished. Since the evening when Geoffrey had made his boyishly frank avowal in favour of his Mistress Fortune, she of the cloth of gold attire, he had advanced a step towards realization. With all the acquisitive lust of his father, he lacked a certain stoicism, an indifference to exterior forces that had characterized the latter. He was more susceptible of impression from without. There are some characters that persist, despite environment, whilst there are others as susceptible to it as plastic clay to the hands of the modeller. What Geoffrey might have been depended largely on whether he fell into the hands of God or devil. His gospel of life might have been made for him by either. As it happened, it was contained in his father's letters, the one consistent and continued system of ethical instruction he had been subjected to. Beside the strenuous teaching of these letters, the pietism of his aunts—the simple moral code of truth and love that sufficed for Cherry—was but as thin water-gruel to blood-making fare. The red note of fight that tinged the paternal gospel had an appeal in it to youth and its imagination quite irresistible. Wealth, by the rapid attainment of riches through honest means, if honest means sufficed, if not by the sharp-wittedness and intellectual over-reaching that blurs the clear line between old-fashioned right and wrong, was in the air. Fortunes made in the morning—paper fortunes—were lost in the

evening. A rough-tongued, meanly-clad digger developed almost at a stroke of the pick into an over-dressed man of fortune, who spent his quickly earned gains in purposeless profusion.

The city, born of the day before yesterday, daily sent its streets and rows of houses further afield. The railway linked it to the Metropolis, and lines of great steamships in turn linked the latter to the Motherland. Into the young community, where but a few years ago the surrounding hills were covered with timber, and on the plains beyond pastured a few score sheep, came pouring the luxury of the Old World, paid for by the gold that the stampers without cessation crushed from the reefs that underlay the foundations of the city.

The little world about Geoffrey hummed with the sounds of human bees gathering in their store. At the Stock Exchange in the heart of the city the crowd blocked the footway and overflowed into the road. Men bought and sold scrip in the open thoroughfare, cabs and carts opening up avenues through a swarm that closed upon their wheels. Scrip changed hands a dozen times a day. Speculation was everywhere. You could not elude it. It rioted in the market place, it penetrated to the home. The rise and fall of shares, the operations of this or that giant of the gold-bourse made the staple conversation of the whole community.

A few—a very few—kept their heads, and were content with the legitimate gains of their calling. Barlow was one of the few; his partner one of the many. The older head counselled the younger in vain—and, indeed, it was hard to resist the fascination of the universal gamble. "Billy," old warrior as he was, sometimes felt a touch of the fever himself, but so far had been able to cast it off. He kept a never-ceasing, never-relaxing hold on the business of the

firm. It was not that he questioned the good intent of his old friend's son, but he knew the dangers, the gambling optimism, the risks of the life around him, and he shielded the firm's honour with untiring vigilance. He had tried, with but doubtful success, to imbue his young partner with a sense of the firm's responsibility, the trust reposed in it, the safeguarding of the interests committed to it; he pictured to him what a single breach of faith might mean, not alone to them, but to the men and women who placed such absolute confidence in their fidelity.

"Go slow, dear boy! For God's sake go slow! Security is everything; brick upon brick truly laid. Beware of the Jerry-built fortune that will tumble about your ears in a year or two."

"I want a fortune, a big fortune, Barlow, and I mean to have it. Why do you mistrust me?"

"It isn't that I mistrust you, but I mistrust the devil that runs the show in this place and collects the dues. He's not a bad sort of devil as devils go, puts a good few prizes in his lottery, and pays up sometimes almost like a gentleman. But, win or lose, he scores all the time; and he has a way with him so that you like him most just when he's about to take you down. He's a devil with a large S, like his own tail, and the name on his card is 'Speculation.' Chuck it, my dear boy! Chuck it!"

Geoffrey laughed. "It's the fool who hangs on that drops in," he said paradoxically. "I cut my losses. One can't fall in far on that line."

"Hum!" said Barlow, with a shake of the head. "This devil I speak of knows that game as well as the rest."

The Golden City Stock Exchange was, it prided itself, up to date. A brick building, two stories in height, the ground floor was taken up for the most part by a hall and staircase and the offices of brokers. There were brokers

of pretty well every nationality and every degree of educational acquirements, from the gentleman who could with difficulty sign his contract notes, to the graduate of an old world 'Varsity. And the degrees of their trustworthiness were as varied as their other qualities.

The Exchange itself was a large hall sacred to the use of members. Here and there against the blank walls were placed blackboards, on which were chalked the latest yields, declarations of dividends, and a goodly list of "calls made." Plans, maps, files of newspapers from other mining centres, made up the rest of its fittings. At the head of the hall, extending the full width of the wall, was an exceptionally large blackboard with a permanent list, added to from time to time, of the mines on the field, and spaced for the prices of sales and purchases of stock. Immediately below this board stood the rostrum of "The Caller."

On either side of the room were rows of small tables, each with a tablet bearing the name of a broker. The body of the hall was filled with rows of chairs.

The Exchange bell rang, and into the room poured members who filled the rows of chairs. The brokers and their clerks seated themselves at their respective tables, and the crowd of jobbers out-of-doors, who not being members had to transact their business through the brokers, knew that their men were "On change."

A small boy, with a sponge and a piece of chalk, mounted a ladder resting against the big blackboard, and business began.

The Caller was a gentleman from 'Frisco way, with a clear voice and a nasal intonation. He took the names in the alphabetical order in which they appeared on the board.

"Austral No. I.! Seller? Buyer?" He gets no offer, and passes on to more favoured stock.

"Bond of Union! Seller?"

A broker looks up from his list of commissions—

"Thirteen."

"Seller thirteen. Buyer?"

A stout citizen with a massive watch-chain chips in—

"Buyer, ten an' six."

"Seller thirteen. Buyer ten and six. Come together."

Selling broker, reluctantly: "Seller, twelve and six."

"Seller, twelve and six. Buyer ten and six. Come together," rattles out the Caller. "Come together."

But the fat citizen with the watch-chain is obdurate, and, despite repeated invitations to "come together," he sticks fast at "ten and six." The boy is about to chalk down the selling and buying prices when he grudgingly advances to "eleven." Then the seller is urged to "come together," but he refuses to budge, and the prices are finally chalked down without a sale.

But it is when the Caller gets to a stock that is booming that the fun becomes fast and furious, and the need for repeated invitations to "come together" ceases to exist.

A casual stranger in a goldfield will probably get hopelessly confused with the nomenclature of its mines. The "Happy-go-lucky" mother mine will probably, assuming it to be a paying reef, be accompanied by a host of satellites: No. 1 North, No. 1 South, and so on along the line; and if he does not know enough to warn him that a claim east of a north and south reef underlying west cannot cut that reef, he may drop in for a parcel of shares in the No. 1 East, where the wind bites shrewdly for the shorn lamb.

It is a lovely business dabbling in mining-stock, and altogether instructive to youth. Its allurements account for Jones, sometime teller at the Austral Chartered Banking Company, now tending the "homely, slighted shepherd's trade" somewhere in Riverina; or Brown, the father of a

large family, and only stay of a widowed mother-in-law with three unmarried daughters, in straitened circumstances, incontinently hanging himself one morning from a beam in the stable; or Robinson making music with a hammer and a pile of blue stone in the local gaol. It also accounts, on the other side of the ledger, for Jenkins's palatial mansion by the local lake of Como, where fountains "gush i' the roses," and the Misses Jenkins hand tea and cake to the bishop; or it maybe Smith, now roaming the outskirts of Society in London, with two well-dowried daughters in the matrimonial market, and "Mar" concealed in the country.

The Exchange meetings were held twice a day, morning and afternoon "call," and it was after the latter, one day in June, that the citizen with the massive watch-chain made his way, comfortably wrapped in a thick, warm overcoat—for the weather was cold and wet—to the office of Barlow and Merton. He had business with the younger member of the firm, whom he greeted familiarly as "Geoff."

"Ah, Captain! What brings you here; anything in our way?"

The Captain shook his head vigorously, and filled the junior partner's room with clouds of smoke from a cigar of exceptional strength. He hailed originally from Cornwall, where he had worked in the tin mines, and in some capacity there had acquired the title of "Captain;" certainly, it was not by way of military or naval commission. However, it had stuck to him.

"Not law, my boy; never touch it, on principle. Ain't fast enough for me. 'The law's delays.' 'Bout closing-up time, ain't it?"

"Yes. Barlow left an hour ago. The clerks were leaving as you came in."

"Well, let 'em all clear out. Have a smoke?"

He passed over a cigar, abstracted from his watch-pocket. As the Captain preferred strength to quality Merton declined and got out his pipe.

"All well at home?"

"Right as a trivet. We expect Carrie home on Monday."

"Oh! Had a good time?"

"You may bet on that, my boy. If there's a good time on within cooee that girl's there! Right on the spot! Me and the missus don't spare nothin' on Carrie, and she don't spare us." He chuckled. "But there, lad, what's it for if not to spend? The old woman ain't happy unless she's making odd ha'pence out of John Chinaman and the butcher. But, lor! Carrie she spends it like a duchess. She's our only child left, Merton, the child of our old age, and she'll have the best money can buy, and why shouldn't she? Me and Mar lived pretty nigh on the smell of an oil rag, when we could have enjoyed good tucker, and now we might have it, we've lost the taste for it. It's rum, isn't it?—when you could do with it you ain't got it, and when you've got it you're too used up for it. But it does us good to see Carrie wallerin' in good living—reg'larly wallerin' in it. She's like a rooster—a sort of female rooster, if you catch on—perking her saucy little head up, and rustling it like one of the best. It does me and Mar good just to see her. That's what we live for, Merton, piling up the dollars for her to spend.

"Now, lad, as we've got the place to ourselves, we'll come to business. I knew your uncle, the Colonel, when you were so high," putting his hand on the back of a chair; "I was only a digger in those days, and he was a mighty fine gentleman; dare say he wouldn't have dusted his boots on me in those days—wonder what he'd say now?" and the massive gold chain on the broad expanse of gravy-spotted

waistcoat seemed to chink a self-approving chorus. "I tell you straight, I didn't like him. Didn't like his sort. There always was bad blood between us diggers and the dandies of the camp. The blarsted wretches led us a dog's life in the early days, hunting us all over the diggings for licences. Why, lad, I've been in the 'logs' tied up like a billy goat to a stump, an' I didn't forget it for many a long day. But I'll say this for the Colonel, he was a white man, and played a straight game. Never thought in those days I'd live to call his nevvy Geoff."

"It takes all sorts to make a world, Captain; but this is not what you called to tell me?"

"No, it ain't. It's only the overtoor—the music before the play."

"Well, what's the play?"

"To come to it straight and square, Merton, it's this, I can put you into as good a thing as this field has seen for the past ten years or more—on condition, lad, on condition, of course. I've had my eye on you."

"I think I can guess it."

"There isn't her like in the city, Geoff. Pretty ain't the name for it; spirit ain't the name for it; society ain't the name for it; nor eddication. She's the lot and a mountain of tailings thrown in. Marry her, lad. Me and her Mar's keen on it. Lord! to think of it; me, as the old Colonel wouldn't——"

"Yes, yes! but what does Carrie say?"

"I've prospected her, and Mar's prospected her, and we reckon it will be all right. She's there for you to peg out, lad."

"What is the 'spec', this good thing of yours?"

"That's tellings; but I'll let you know this much, on your sacred oath not to give it mouth to any one. There's a man I know is working with a party on tribute. Hasn't

paid a divvy for many a day, just bread and butter. He's lying low, keepin' it dark. They've been on wash dirt, poor stuff, but the other day my man came on indications of the reef. On the quiet he sunk a bit and—you know the Golden Orient line—well, we reckon it's pretty well plumb on it. The man that owns it doesn't know anything worth knowing. He went for the wash, an' he's had the wash. In old days they did pretty well out of it, and then the Chinamen took a bit out of it; but you know what it was in those days, all alluvial; no one bothered about quartz. He's one of the old sort, and doesn't know, and perhaps doesn't care. If it's the Golden Orient line, Merton, there's fortune after fortune in it, and we can buy it from this old fool for a song."

Geoffrey's eyes glinted with suppressed excitement. The Golden Orient! Why, it was the richest line of reef in the field. Surely someone must have guessed at this before!

"Do you say only this man, the tribute holder, knows of it?"

"Yes, only him and me, Geoff. We were chums in the old days, and I've helped him a bit of late. Not to say that would count much, but I can find the cash and he can't, and so he wants me. The day he dropped to it he talked with his mates; they were down to their boot uppers, and the wash was getting poorer and poorer every day. He offered to take over the tribute on his own, and cleared them out at a pound a head. Same day he saw the old man, and said they had to chuck it, but he'd try to find a substitute; or, if he'd sell, perhaps a straight-out buyer. He found the buyer right enough. I gave the old man five hundred pounds for his right and title, and the transfer's in my safe. There's a half-share for you, Geoff, and I'll take your bills at any date you like."

"What about Barlow?"

"Not a word to Billy. He's just full of rotten old notions. He'd give us away in a wink."

"Look here, Captain, I'll let you know to-morrow."

"Can't hold it over, my lad. After to-morrow it's off."

"Very well, to-morrow then."

"So long!" said the Captain, rising.

He had reached the door when Merton added—

"By the way, don't say anything to Carrie. I'd rather do that my own way, you know—it wouldn't be fair to her; you understand?"

"All right! Think it over if you like. It's a chance don't come every day. I've taken to you, Geoff, and I'd like to see you settled down. What I'm doing for you I'm doing for my little girl. There ain't no guarantee in law stronger than that."

He departed, trailing clouds of tobacco smoke behind him.

The junior partner, left alone, clasped his hands behind his head, tilted his chair to a comfortable angle, and thought over the surprising offer. It was the first considerable temptation that had come his way. The risk was slight, the Captain too old a stager not to cover up an absolute knowledge by the plausible show of discovery.

A wife! well he had not thought of a wife yet awhile. Women had stirred his blood, but none had yet reached his heart. Carrie came as near to it as any of them.

The old aunts and Cherry in their quiet home were as far removed from his life as a nunnery. He saw them but rarely now. A visit to them seemed to irritate rather than tranquillize him. The peace of the home, the restfulness of its little world, the old-time simplicity, the Puritan atmosphere, jarred on him. The fever of life was in his veins, and the glitter of its riches filled his eyes. Even the

restraint of his professional life, its hours of dull plodding labour, galled him.

"Billy's" devil had him in the toils—the game of speculation had grown on him day by day. To him the habit of the opium smoker, the craving of the absinthe drinker was not more subtle or more powerful in its allurement than the play of the devil's dice "on change." "The game" had possession of his soul!

Into the restless, nervous life that daily claimed him more and more the figure of Carrie fitted with an element of appropriateness. Tall, graceful, a mobile ever-changing face with something of the glint of burnished metal in her eyes, she seemed as if designed by Nature for the life in which she moved. Eyes that saw the world's beauty in a mullock heap that marked the opening of a shaft leading down to gold—the almighty god—found delight in the riot of colour, the blaze of garish jewels that marked her passage through the city.

There was neither class nor mass in this new community; no line of social demarcation between Jack and his master; for Jack, by the acknowledged standard, might to-morrow be as good as, or better than, his master of to-day.

Aunt Felicia still held by some old-world prejudices concerning social status; but Geoffrey her nephew had been born into the new world, and took men for what they were worth, or might be worth to-morrow.

Carrie's social status was therefore just what her father's wealth made it, and on that plane he was well advanced.

When next day Captain Joshua Hawkins received a return call from the junior partner he was given the answer he had anticipated. Geoffrey took his chance with both hands.

CHAPTER III

THE two aunts and Cherry were seated in lounge chairs on the broad verandah, endeavouring to find compensation in the evening air for the heat of the summer day.

Geoffrey had communicated to them by a brief note the news of his engagement. It was right they should be the first to know of it; he did not add that a well-founded doubt as to the reception of the news withheld him from conveying it in person.

Aunt Felicia had been ominously silent since the morning post had delivered the missive, couched in appropriately dutiful tones. To tell the truth, it was a painfully artificial composition, though had it been less so the shrewd old lady would have read between the lines.

Aunt Tod had also received the announcement in silence. She waited the pronouncement of her sister. To Cherry, the domestic atmosphere seemed charged with premonitions of an electrical disturbance, the apprehensive silence that precedes a storm.

The storm broke at last.

"The Colonel is dead—thank God!"

"Felicia!" mildly expostulated Aunt Tod.

"I am glad, Tod; glad from my heart he is in his grave. He would have died in action, if there had been any war in this part of the world; but as there wasn't, he died comfortably in bed like a Christian. Had he lived to

this day, it would have broken his heart. His favourite sister's son!"

"But perhaps he loves her, Aunt Felicia," suggested Cherry, out of some dimly defined sense of allegiance to her old playfellow.

"Pish!" said Aunt Felicia, with mighty contempt. "Love, indeed; a chit like that! A man can't love out of his station. Don't talk rubbish to me, child! If a man marries beneath him, he'll live to despise the woman; if he marries above him, he'll live to hate her. I tell you Geoffrey will rue the day he married her."

"We can't all be well-born," timidly pleaded Cherry, conscious of a personal defect in that respect; "but, if they truly love each other, does that matter—really matter?"

"Silly romance is silly romance, and life is life, Cherry Maywood. Not, child, that I am prejudiced against married life as an institution, though goodness knows why it should be called an institution any more than—— What?"—turning sharply on poor Aunt Tod, whose lips were moving.

"Oh, nothing!" she replied in a flutter. "I was only trying to follow you, dear. An institution is an asylum or an orphanage, isn't it?"

"You do talk sense sometimes, Tod!" said Felicia, grimly. "That throws quite a light on the subject."

"Well, we shall see," she resumed after a pause. "We shall see. You can't root up the old landmarks in a day—they're not like allotment pegs—take my word for it, child. When you've had money to spend generation after generation, it's like vaccination against smallpox; but when you come into it for the first time, then you're lucky if it doesn't kill you. My honest opinion"—this to the garden at large—"is that it takes at least three generations before the right

use of money is learned; and Geoffrey is marrying into the first."

"But it isn't wicked to have money," faintly protested Cherry; "and—and—it's so very handy."

Aunt Felicia unbent so far as to smile at this *naïveté*.

"Of course we all want money, child. It isn't the wanting, it's the spending. High and low we all want it, and get it if we can; but the first generation doesn't know what to do with it—the first generation spends it like a fool. Mark my words, Cherry, Geoffrey will make money, and perhaps if he were left alone he might do some good with it; for he comes of folk on his mother's side who have handled it more or less"—and she gave a little sigh—"for generation after generation; but she will squander it right and left. If I were the law," she remarked, putting the words as it were into colloquial capitals, "I would appoint trustees for every first generation after the founder."

Cherry laughed in a decorous minor key. She was not deeply impressed by the first generation theory. To the daughter of the people, God made the great and the lowly in the same mould, of the same material; the differences were but superficial—mere dents or scratches on the surface. When Miss Hilliard retired, as she did soon afterward, she threw a cushion by the side of Auntie Tod, the sympathetic, and sat there.

Auntie Tod seemed to be of no generation worth speaking about, she had so little of the Hilliard pride in her. She took the girl's hand in her own and smoothed it with a tender mother-touch. They two were much to each other. Auntie Tod had a good deal of that leaven of "foolish romance" in her which Miss Felicia had condemned. It had something to do with a packet of old letters and a ring, as good as new, put away in a case. Another woman over the sea had him, and he was old,

gouty, and crotchety. Perhaps Auntie Tod was the better off with her foolish romance and a bright, young, dare-devil face in her memory.

Barlow, when the news reached him, said nothing in public, but in private swore prodigiously, to the great unburdening of his soul.

The wedding, when in due time it came about, was all that money could make it. The Captain did everything with a gilt edge. He was nothing if not profuse. Invitations to the wedding feast were spread broadcast through the city; there was not a dignitary in the place, from the collector of municipal taxes to his Worship the Mayor who did not receive a card of heroic proportions. And Carrie! Carrie lived these ante-nuptial days in the company of smirking misses, who measured and remeasured, fitting here and taking in there, mumbling admiration from mouths filled with pins. She received from her adoring father jewellery of a kind sufficient in value and appropriate as an offering to have endowed a mission to the heathen in perpetuity. Her soul was lifted to the seventh heaven of its happiness.

Geoffrey made a gallant effort to rise to the occasion, and simulated the passion of the devoted lover, as understood by Carrie, with a fine art. He kissed amorously, and she purred, thinking as she rested her cheek on his coat-lapel of her going-away dress or the fine clocks on her stockings. As he murmured love, so she meditated millinery.

After one of these distressing performances with the lights turned low in the drawing-room—it used to be the parlour till she came home from boarding-school—and the Captain and "Mar" beaming in the dining-room, Geoffrey found peculiar delight in a whisky-and-soda at the Pioneers' club.

He had not any illusions about ante or postnuptial conditions. They were prosaic enough in the lives he saw about him; but, hidden away in a quiet corner, he had a picture of something in a rarer atmosphere than his.

The day of the wedding taxed the resources of the livery and bait-stables beyond their accustomed limits. Horses and vehicles had to be gathered in from other sources; even the Funeral Reform Company, whose reform consisted in the substitution of glass-panelled coaches for the old-fashioned hearse, furnished forth coal-black, long-tailed steeds for the conveyance of guests to the marriage-feast.

A rural dean, a rector, and a curate, passing rich on not much more than forty pounds a year, between them tied the wedding-knot.

It required the City Hall to accommodate the wedding guests, who sat down to an old-fashioned breakfast of prodigal purveyance. The Captain had thrown out a hint that the bridal cake might be cut by the bride with the dead Colonel's sword; but Geoffrey paled at such a proposal to the aunts, and it was abandoned. In the end they cut it with the caterer's knife. The guests having been made more or less plethoric with divers and many kinds of food, the customary toasts were proposed. They were brief, till the health of the Captain having been toasted, he responded in a speech lasting about half an hour, recounting, to the evident distress of the bride, his early struggles in life; and in his peroration impressing on the youth of the city and the colony at large what a man could attain by his own valorous efforts.

The married couple went for a honeymoon trip to the metropolis—the country had no delights for Carrie.

CHAPTER IV

DR. DAVID LYALL practised medicine and the art of surgery in Golden City. Although comparatively young, he was one of its leading practitioners. Society expects marriage from the clergy and medical men: the worldly temptations to the one, and the intimate relations of the other being doubtless the origin of this quaint expectation. So far, however, Lyall had not fulfilled the social anticipation.

He had been a guest at the wedding, and, with Barlow, the devoted cavalier of the aunts and Cherry. There was no more welcome guest in their home than David Lyall.

He was not of that type of general practitioner who, with suave manner, cultivates assiduously the gentle art of being all things to all women. David, indeed, was aggressively honest. In this respect he sometimes made his best friends sigh for him; they even suggested to him that there was such a poor policy as being needlessly frank. Truth was a delicate thing, not to be rudely exposed to inclement weather. It was possible to have opinions and yet keep them tight. But, alas! it was all good effort wasted on Lyall. Perhaps indeed it was this crass honesty in the man, this blunt refusal to compromise with facts as he saw them, and as others wished them to be, that won for him the deep-seated trust of his patients. It was characteristic of him that though he toiled by day and night he was almost as impecunious as the curate. Lyall would doubtless

have faced lions, but *hinc non sunt leones;* he could not, however, ask for a fee from the poor, and the poor, being less dowered with delicacy of feeling, eagerly besought his services and honestly liked him the better for his frank tongue. A fellow-practitioner once diagnosed his case as one of "acute integrity." It was not so much that Lyall never told a lie as that he never failed to drag in the truth, neck and crop. The *suppressio veri* was unknown to him.

The Doctor stood a trifle over five feet three in his stockings. His face was round and chubby, his full eyes were masked by spectacles, and his hair bristled with the suggestion of pugnacity. As a Hibernian admirer once remarked, "He said the most audacious things with the coolness of a cucumber." But when it was needed he had a hand as gentle as a woman's, and his heart was quite out of proportion to five feet three.

Lyall's entrance to the practice of his profession in Golden City gave the keynote to his character. It was thus: McPhillamy, new-fledged from Edinburgh—Lyall's own university, by the way—had worked up a little practice to a point that justified him in taking a wife, partly with mixed Scottish motives of still further advancing it, and partly—it might be expressed "most partly"—for clean, honest love. She came to him from the old country, bonnie, fresh-faced, hopeful; and for a year they lived a life of unbroken happiness. Then McPhillamy did something foolishly heroic: sucked a tube in a diphtheritic case—there was no anti-toxin in those days—and died. The patient of course lived, and subsequently went to the dogs in the West. The girl-wife, for she was little more, determined to return to her people, and with this object offered the practice for sale. The sum she set on it was three hundred pounds; that would clear all debts and

enable her to return. She drew a bite from one would-be purchaser; but when he wanted to beat down the price she refused his offer. It left no margin for the voyage. He thereupon determined the matter, after his own fashion, by settling down in the immediate neighbourhood and "hanging out his sign."

The little woman was in despair when, so she always said, Providence sent Doctor David Lyall to her rescue. He interviewed her. She was unversed in the ways of business and suffered somewhat from David's own complaint of integrity.

"The practice," she confided to him, "is almost worthless since the new doctor started."

By dint of questioning he learned that the money she and her husband had sunk in it was all they had; and she could not return without it.

David asked if the new doctor was from Edinburgh; and when she answered "No," she wondered at the emphatic earnestness of his "Thank God!" He bought the practice at her price, exclusive of the household goods. He was embarrassed at her gratitude, and she never afterwards could understand why he was "so short" with her when she expressed it.

A week later the furniture of the year-old home was offered for sale. Before the day of the auction some would-be friends of the new man interviewed him. It is always well to be friends with the new man till you test his strength. After some preliminary palaver about welcoming new talent to the field they laid the following proposition before him.

"Look here, Doctor," said the spokesman, "some of us want to do you a good turn; and it's just occurred to us that if you are going to buy in Mack's furniture you'd better leave it to us. If you get bidding yourself the

brokers will spot and run you for more than it's worth; but if you just leave it in our hands we'll fix all that and get you a real cheap line. You just leave it to us, Doc."

It wasn't the familiarity of the "Doc" that set Lyall's hair bristling in the superlative degree; it was a spasm of the "acute integrity" trouble. When they saw him smile broadly, beautifully, they "fell in" all together. They did not notice the indication of a snarl in the clean-shaven upper lip, and the spectacles spared them the devil in his eyes.

"Thank you, gentlemen, thank you! It would be a pity to have any misunderstanding about so handsome an offer. Let us be quite clear." It might have been, "Let us pray," the intonation was so full of brotherly love. "This is what I understand you propose." He smiled on them with his chubby face as sweetly as any cherub.

"Nothing like a plain business understanding," assented the chief conspirator; and his companions murmured approval.

"Nothing like it," repeated Lyall. "What I understand, gentlemen, is this: You want me to rob a widow."

"Hum—m!" said the spokesman, darkly, "that's not quite——".

"Excuse me, sir! You want me, I repeat, to rob this helpless woman! For what?" And he turned so fiercely on the unhappy spokesman that the gentleman involuntarily stepped back. "I'll tell you!—for a few damned sticks of furniture. There's the door, sir—or perhaps you'd prefer the window." And five feet three of majesty stretched itself. "Get out! and never let me see your dirty faces again."

And they got out without standing on any ceremony of going.

This was not an auspicious way of starting practice,

but it was David's way. And how they ran him at the auction! Has it not gone down as a chronicle in the city's history? The cheap wits dubbed it "St. David's Day."

The little widow's eyes glistened with the rapacity of the poor in purse when she received the account, and could not check the items for the trembling of her hand. David's name got into her prayers that night in a way the dead husband could understand, if his celestial ears were not occupied with other music—it could scarce be sweeter.

The interloper subsequently left his card; but Lyall, taking it carefully by a corner in his gloved hand—it pleased his fancy to treat it as something tainted—walked a block down the street to return it with his compliments—a proceeding that quite bewildered the small maid into whose hands it was passed.

This feud was of long standing. Lyall might have turned the incident into a romance by marrying the young widow, after the period of conventional mourning had elapsed. But as events went, he saw her for the last time a few days after the auction sale. It was at the railway station. The very last glimpse he had was of a waving hand at the carriage window.

The true sequel to the story came later, when the spokesman called one morning at the surgery.

David glowered at him. "Good morning, sir!"

"Good morning, Doctor. I've come to consult you professionally."

"Well, sir, my fee is half a guinea." He had no compunction on the score of the fee on this occasion. "I have no objection to treat you professionally. Indeed, I am bound to do so if you wish it. You must understand, however, that our relations are purely professional—purely so. You are no friend of mine and I have no desire you should be."

Now this man was of some influence in the city—an alderman, an "Ancient Buffalo," and several other things by means of which divers sick persons may be gathered in. It will therefore be seen that David's attitude was wholly lacking in diplomacy.

"Well," said the alderman, "I'm with you there. I ask you to take my case in hand professionally. I know that anything I say will not be blabbed about, and I know you'll do your level best. As to friendship—confound your friendship!"

Lyall softened. There was stuff in this man after his own heart.

"Well, sir, that's straightforward! I'll treat you professionally, and I'll do my best to set you up again. Open your shirt and let us see what's the matter." And he reached out for his stethoscope.

Now, this feud was of quite brief standing, for later on Lyall and the alderman became fast friends.

The Doctor made the acquaintance of Barlow quite early in the days of practice. Not that the latter needed professional advice; but meeting him first at the local club-house, he afterwards became familiarly acquainted with him at the home of the Hilliards. Lyall had been furnished with letters of introduction to people in the city, and of those he used was one to the maiden ladies.

He frequently "dropped in" to supper on Sunday evenings in the familiar way of the early days still upheld in a few of the older homes. In time he became as welcome a guest as Barlow himself. Aunt Felicia, however, differentiated between them as the one of mature years and experience, and the other an irresponsible youth who might possibly be trusted in a mild case of infantile thrush. As a consequence, she mothered David in ways he understood and appreciated. Not infrequently he took home

pots of black-currant jam for colds, when he had them, with the perfect assumption of faith in her sovereign specific.

On the Sunday evening following the wedding the supper-table had its full complement. Barlow's face, inclining of late to be somewhat florid, and grey-thatched head filled in a sombre space at the base of "our brother's portrait." On these occasions he carved; and the old man knew to a nicety the particular morsels that were pleasing to the ladies. Miss Hilliard, by the way, graced the foot of the table in the full dignity of her goffered headgear. Barlow had Miss Todd to the right and Cherry to the left. Lyall invariably contrived to sit next the latter; they were the children of the household.

"Have you seen your friend the Hatter lately, Cherry?" inquired Barlow.

"Not for an age. We were wondering the other day, auntie and I, what had become of him."

"He has not called for a long time now," added the old lady. "Indeed, I sometimes take myself to task about it. I'm afraid I was a little personal when last he was here; but, really, the man was looking like an ourang-outang. His beard was as long as a patriarch's, and his hair as long——"

"As a poet's," supplied Cherry.

"So you've not heard the news, then?" inquired Barlow.

"What news?"

"Why, it's all over the place. The Hatter is in a fair way to be a millionaire."

"The Hatter!"

"Yes, the Hatter. One day, rambling in the gullies for inspiration, he struck on quartz outcropping, and as full of gold as Miss Hilliard's Christmas pudding is of plums. They say it is so rich that the gold holds the quartz

together, instead of the other way round. Winstanley, the editor of the *Evening Nugget*, tells me there can be no doubt about it, for he hasn't heard of Chloe and the rest of the old Hatter's girls for a solid six weeks."

"The Hatter is a very special friend of mine, Doctor. I don't believe he'll do anything foolish with his money. He's a—he's a philosopher."

"A what?"

"A philosopher."

"The race of philosophers is extinct, Cherry, my child," said Barlow, filling his claret-glass. "Went out with the dodo, or thereabout."

"A philosopher," remarked Lyall, sagely, "is a chap who can't get what he wants, and gammons that he wouldn't have it if he could. But, as Barlow says, he's mostly dead."

"Well, the Hatter has the most beautiful philosophy," persisted Cherry.

"Naturally a poet's philosophy would be beautiful or nothing. Perhaps I should have said 'and nothing.'"

"But who *is* the Hatter?" asked the Doctor, emphasizing the "is."

"From what I can make out," replied Barlow, "though no one seems to know very much about him, he was one of the first men in the rush. Came here about your time, Miss Hilliard. They say he fell on good luck straight away; made, some say twenty, some say up to fifty thousand pounds, and then disappeared. Years after—three, six, ten, no one seems to know exactly—he reappeared, broken up, queer. Joined one or two parties, was impossible, he was always being chucked; so at last he had to go on his own, a lone-hand digger—that's what a hatter means, Lyall."

"Poor old Hatter!" said Cherry, with a note of sympathy.

"Hawkins, the Captain, seems to have been mixed up in his business. Have heard they were related; but he also chucked him with the rest."

"Such a continuous experience in 'chucking' does not, I should think, lead one as a rule to the feet of the Muses," suggested Lyall.

"No. Poetry doesn't usually express that sort of experience with sufficient emphasis," assented Barlow. "However, he's all right now."

"His sanity," commented the Doctor, "will be beyond doubt, his philosophy be found impressive, his poetry exquisite, his friends will be as the sand of the sea. Oh, most excellent Hatter!"

CHAPTER V

THE honeymoon of the newly wed couple was a carnival of distractions. Geoffrey reflected that perhaps such an experience was necessary to convince man of the possibility of getting a minimum of enjoyment at a maximum of expenditure. With the humility of his sex at such times he subordinated his needs to his wife's exactions.

The great problem that filled Carrie's mind appeared to be how many costumes it was possible to get in and out of in the course of a day.

The dreary, uninteresting weeks were filled with rustling promenades on the esplanade—they were spending this joyous time at the seaside—dinners in full dress, and prominent seats at the theatre. Geoffrey felt like an unhappy "super," who had by some mistake got within the circle of limelight intended for the "star." There was no affectation of not being newly wed about Carrie. It was a subject for advertisement, and the opportunity one to be seized.

Merton was not a man of ideals. It was well he was not. Carrie certainly would not have satisfied any rational ideal of her sex. Like most men, he had the vaguest conception of what he wanted in life beyond money. Given the money, the rest it seemed to him would follow. Perhaps something in politics or finance, a big place in the world, much applause, much self-sufficiency. He had not,

however, contemplated a life moving on such a plane as this. He listened with enforced patience to comparative estimates of this manner of doing things, and that—things that seemed to him scarce worth the doing at all; the latest modes in this and that, the awful taste of so-and-so, and the absolute necessity of having something similar to that possessed by some one else.

They returned to a home furnished to the contents of the book-shelves by discriminating tradesmen. The only homely thing about it, Geoffrey thought, was his hat on the hall-stand. One room had been assigned to him as a study —study being about the last thing it was likely to be used for.

After wandering round the house for a week, he finally determined to make the study habitable, and proceeded to do so by ejecting several delicately constructed chairs of a bastard chippendale order, clearing the walls of excrescences in the form of brackets and the like, removing from them also some grievous works of alleged art. He then opened the window and let in the fresh air, for the place from cellar to garret was pungent with sickly perfumes.

Having done this, he sat down in the least uncomfortable chair remaining, and wondered where he would find the money to pay for all this apparatus. There had been no development of the mining property as yet. The Captain was slow to move in the matter. It would be injudicious to make a move too soon, he said, and so Geoffrey had at present no other resources to depend upon than the modest earnings from his profession and certain risky ventures on the Stock Exchange.

Carrie protested indignantly against the profanation of the study by the summary ejection of the major portion of its contents; but as Geoffrey remained firm in taking possession for himself of at least one room in the house,

she eventually, though not without tears, accepted the situation.

"And now, Carrie," said Merton, when the matter was finally determined, "I think we'd better understand each other. How are we going to keep this up—pay the bills, you know?"

She sat opposite to him, with one leg crossed over the other, the pointed toe of her shoe protruding beyond the lace of her underskirt. The nervous movement of the foot was an index to her ruffled feelings. She was sulky. Her thin lips were closed in a curveless line. One finger of her much-jewelled right hand tapped against the wood of the chair-arm on which it rested.

"How do I know!"

"Well, if you don't, I'm afraid I don't, dear. I left this house business to your father, and I'm afraid he has rather over-estimated my means. Your father's settlement was generous, I admit, but you must see I can't touch that; and if I could, I don't propose to live on my wife, you know."

"Oh no! Of course I understand that. But you wouldn't have me live in two rooms and a kitchen?"

"Oh no, Carrie! Of course we—we must keep up some sort of appearance, that goes without saying. But isn't this rather more than we need?"

"Father told me you would be rich."

"Well, I may be some day, but I'm not yet; and I'd rather like to pay my way as I go."

"I'm sure I'm not extravagant. There's Mrs. ——" and here followed a detailed account of the expenditure of that lady—"and I only want what a woman has a right to expect. You wouldn't like to be ashamed of me before other women?"

"I was only thinking about being ashamed before the butcher, the baker, and the rest."

"You are well known; surely there is no difficulty in that?"

"It isn't that altogether, Carrie. You see, my folk—we've always paid as we went—and—and"— he felt that he was on delicate ground—"I don't altogether care for this—this——"

"Well?"

"Well, if you will have it, all this display and ostentation. Surely to Heaven two people don't want all this—this truck!"

"What truck?"—with a contemptuous curl of the thin lip.

"This big house, all this costly showy furniture, the servants—three of them."

"Did you marry me to make me your servant? Is that your idea of a wife, Geoffrey?"

"No, Carrie; of course it isn't. Do be sensible! I want you to be comfortable, of course. It isn't that. But, couldn't we live more for ourselves and not so much for all these people who have been crowding the place for the past three weeks?"

"Do you expect me to have no friends?"

"Of course I want you to have friends." His own foot was beginning to wriggle by this time. Geoffrey's stock of patience was not great. "You could have friends and yet live quietly, without display."

"You don't want me to have any amusement, any pleasure, Geoffrey, that's what it is. You want me to mope all day, darning stockings and making jam, living my days in a print blouse. Well, I won't, Geoffrey; I won't. Why should I? You don't love me, Geoffrey; that is what you mean. If you loved me, you would like to see me happy. You would wish to give me everything I wanted. You would not like to see me look small before other women.

You would like to show me to the world as the best of them. You wouldn't let me soil my little finger, if you loved me."

Geoffrey gripped what love meant in this high life below stairs. It was a trifle lower than even the plane on which he had set it. He said no more. What good was it? A shrug of the shoulders expressed it all.

Carrie broke into a tempest of tears. The unspoken outrage was greater than the spoken.

The weeks went by, the months went by; bills fell on him like snowflakes; not indeed that they were as light, or made any attempt to liquidate themselves, but they were many. He had vainly endeavoured to compass the weekly expenditure by an allowance to his wife, but she revolted against the tyranny of accounts. The servants apparently emulated Lucullus in their feasting, and rendered only such slight service as their dignity permitted.

"I don't know anything about domestic economy, Carrie," he confessed, as one evening he glanced wearily through a sheaf of household bills; "but two gallons of milk per diem seems a goodly allowance for five people."

"There is the cat!" said Carrie, shortly. She detested these domestic details.

"Doubtless it is a fine cat as a cat; but even including that humble retainer it seems a lot. Perhaps Rose"—a freckle-faced housemaid—"uses it for her complexion; or perhaps John"—he was known as the butler, but he really cleaned the boots and knives—"perhaps John is on a milk diet. Then there is the butcher. Really I think it would be cheaper to barbecue an ox on the sabbath; it might possibly, with a lamb or two thrown in and a coop of chickens, last out the week."

"You are horrid, Geoffrey, horrid! One would think there was no management in the house, to hear you talk.

Why, it was only yesterday I told cook she must keep the stale bread for bread crumbs."

Geoffrey groaned in spirit. Was the sense of proportion withheld by intent of the Deity from woman?

"Without offence, Carrie, may I refer to this matter of bread. There is, of course, excellent authority for the statement that man does not live by bread alone, but this house seems to furnish an exception to prove the rule. A loaf per head per diem or nearly so, leaving the crumbs out of the question, is a generous standard, to say the least of it. I grieve to think of John's condition with two pounds of new bread daily disposed of. Then here is the grocer. One would think the family daily anointed their heads with jam; and as to the butter, unless they use it on the boots and floors, it's hard to say what is done with it. On a modest computation you could butter an acre of bread with the weekly supply."

Carrie commenced to cry, and there is no answer to a woman's tears. At least, no man has found it. It always ended thus, and then things went on in the old way.

It was, however, when the milliner's, dressmaker's and draper's bills came to hand that Geoffrey's patience finally broke down. The details were beyond his comprehension —one item alone he grasped, three hats at five guineas a piece. He marvelled at the price of artificial roses when one could buy a handful of natural blooms for a shilling. These bills were past all comment. He laid them silently before Carrie.

"I'm afraid I must ask you to meet these out of your own funds. They are quite beyond my means."

Carrie glanced at them. She was indignant. The peccant draper had charged for sixpennyworth of safety pins she had not purchased. It must be deducted at once. As to the hats, one must have hats; she presumed she was

not expected to go about bareheaded. Of course it wasn't the artificial flowers. It was the style one paid for.

Geoffrey admitted that she had struck bed-rock. Truly it was the style one paid for!

In the end Carrie settled the bills; and as the payment for the time exhausted her exchequer she levied on Geoffrey for pocket-money.

One day Barlow, who detested the task with all his heart, had a serious talk with the junior partner on the subject of the partnership account. The same day Geoffrey saw the Captain.

"Mustn't be hasty about these things, Merton, but the time is about ripe now. On Monday next I shall put some men on to prospect that ground of ours. Maybe," and he winked genially, "maybe we shall find some indications of quartz."

A fortnight later a cautious paragraph appeared in the mining columns of the *Daily Miner* announcing possible developments in the supposed worked-out ground taken over some time ago by Captain Hawkins. A trial shaft was sunk, with windlass and tub, and then indications were announced. Later on payable quartz was talked of and a hint given of a probable company with sufficient capital to work the mine on up-to-date methods.

The Captain engineered the business with all the skill of an accomplished hand.

At last the glowing prospectus with its comforting assurances from experts, whose expertness in detecting traces of the precious metal in any geological formation you liked to place before them was undoubted and wholly to be trusted, was spread out on his desk with the odour of printers' ink still clinging to it. Geoffrey's hopes began to rise; and the multiplication of bills ceased to harrow the midnight hours he spent by the side of his partner for life.

CHAPTER VI

CAPTAIN HAWKINS christened the mine the "Crœsus Consols." When asked by a fellow-promoter of speculative properties who the so-and-so "Crœsus" was, the Captain defined him to be "an old-fashioned bloke with no end of cash." He knew the value of a high-sounding title. All the roses that bloomed in the Mining Exchange had promising names or suggestively promising names. There were, for example, the "Success United," and "Fortune No. 1," not to mention the "Good luck Extended," the "First in the Field," the "Happy Venture North," and the "United Brothers."

Within six months of flotation poppet heads were up over the original shaft and a house erected for the stampers to crush the gold-bearing quartz. Cages laden with the stone came merrily up to the surface, and down below miners sweated at their task. The stone was rich, payable to an excellent degree. The gamble on the Stock Exchange in "Crœsus Consols," up to-day on one report, down to-morrow on another—unofficial reports that had little or no foundation in fact—waxed fierce and furious. Captain Hawkins smoked ranker cigars than ever, and his partner, whose original holding had been converted into crisp, clean-looking scrip, held every share he owned, and with the money he could raise bought in more when an opportune rumour caused a temporary depression in price.

The mine commenced to pay regular dividends. Soon

the river Pactolus flowed past Geoffrey's door. The petty details of domestic accounts were put aside, he hoped, for ever. Carrie could run riot in hats, and rival the peacocks in her trains, but he only laughed; had he not "Crœsus" at his back?

The house, once too large, was now all too small. Carrie was jubilant when the blue-stone edifice by the bank of the local lake of Como was begun. It was to have a tower, of course. They had no particular use for a tower, no one has nowadays, but a tower is a social distinction in architecture. Then there would be a *porte cochère* for the carriage to wait under, and a spacious paved hall, sacred to Æolus, the god of draughts; a gothic window, of course, with leaded glass of brilliant colouring.

Mr. William Barlow noted these developments with apprehension; but, proving the truth of the scriptural adage regarding the way of the world towards him who hath, he found that the business of the firm steadily increased. Now "Billy," though not a Puritan in business, felt some qualms of conscience at the new class of business coming to the firm.

Perhaps it was no affair of his to inquire into the *bonâ fides* of the companies floated on the money provided by a confiding public. All he had to do was to see that the legal requirements were fulfilled. Nevertheless he felt restive, though he was without any sound business ground on which to oppose the new development.

In time the senior partner began to realize that the junior partner was really the ruling spirit in the firm. Geoffrey had, with the turn of his tide, developed a new and by no means pleasing aggressiveness of manner. A few guineas added, or a few guineas taken away, lend weight or weakness to the words of man. Geoffrey was at first agreeably surprised to note the new value of his words. The

world's appreciation of them became so evident that naturally he also came to share in this appreciation.

He talked what he called "business" to the old man, his partner, so persistently that from bursts of indignant red-lettered revolt, the senior came to listen with something of respect to the opinions of his junior colleague.

The sacred breath of the wandering dervish is not more precious than the words that fall from the lips of the man who has but to say to the banker "pay," and straightway he pays.

So it came about that more and more the business of the firm passed into the hands of the junior partner.

But if Barlow, perhaps with a sigh and a reserve of doubt, yielded to the will of Geoffrey, and admitted the increasing success of his methods, the distrust and antipathy he had always felt towards Carrie by no means underwent a similar change.

The Hatter, too, was on the high-road to prosperity. He had named his claim the "Celestine." The why or the wherefore of the name was known alone to him. Whatever poetic fancy lay in the title was speedily submerged. A host of other claims were pegged out on the line of reef, and "Celestine" matured into "Mother Celestine." There were "Celestines," No. 1 North, and No. 1 South, and so on, till you reached the "Celestine and Jones United." With "Celestine" the newspapers declared the exciting era of nuggets had been renewed. One day the Hatter and his party—for the exigency of working-expenses had compelled him to take in certain men of capital—brought to light a nugget weighing one hundred and sixty ounces; the following day smaller ones of thirty to forty ounces were unearthed, and then a week later followed a lump of almost pure gold over six hundred ounces in weight. It was brought into the city and exhibited in a shop window. For days you had to

diverge into the roadway when passing this shop, so great was the crowd collected to get a sight of a mass of gold such as set men's hearts aflame with the lust of riches. Old diggers felt the spirit of the earlier days stir in their blood. The days and nights were full of the clamour of tongues, talking of lucky finds when the city was a honeycomb of shafts put down with great hope, and for the most part abandoned with empty pockets.

Meantime the Hatter smoked his pipe and lived the hermit life of old. He might have had many friends in these days. His banking account reached five figures, and many men looked him up and sought out all about him. What they found was legendary; and, as in the nature of legend, largely lie. He was the son of an earl, the brother of a great English statesman, the humble offspring of a blacksmith, the heir to a title and great estates—till the public imagination was exhausted.

Then Captain Hawkins let it be known on Change that the Hatter was his prodigal younger brother, for many years an outcast from the bosom of the exclusive Hawkins family, but now happily restored to it by "Celestine."

He publicly invited the Hatter to come down from his hillside hermitage to the warmth and welcome of the Hawkins' hearth. He indited congratulatory letters to him, addressing him in fraternal terms as "My dear Rufus."

But Rufus Hawkins, the disowned, tossed these affectionate epistles into the fire, using unbrotherly language as he did so. The *Evening Nugget* republished some of the choicest of his verses to Chloe and the other maidens, as cherished contributions from the gifted pen of our esteemed citizen, the wealthy proprietor of that great mine the "Mother Celestine," and mailed a dozen copies to the port. "Soulful Sarah," cast into deeper gloom than ever by the

contrasted fortune of her rival, searched her soul with a tooth-comb for the wherewithal to keep her end up in the field of literature. She became at last so painfully cynical, so darkly pessimistic in her outpourings that the editor turned off her tap till perchance the springtime might bring her muse into a more cheerful state of mind.

The hermit was advised by the cathedral committee that his soul would find much consolation in the erection of a superb eastern window in coloured glass; and the hospital committee suggested, as a more practical application of his funds, the erection of a new wing to that edifice. A proposal for an art gallery, a *crèche* for infants, a new institution for promoting temperance among widows, to be known as the "Society of Bereaved Sisters," a fountain for horses, together with many other public-spirited performances, were commended to him in a fine vein of appeal to his generous purse.

But the Hatter continued to smoke vile tobacco and drink astringent tea, unmoved by these appeals. Finally the public tired of the subject, and a new excitement arising, he was left in peace.

To his old friends, however, he remained true, and was sorely disappointed when a suggestion for the presentation of a gold salver to the Misses Hilliard was kindly but firmly declined.

To Cherry alone he confided his intentions. She had taken him seriously, and the balm of being taken seriously, after the public reception of his wealth, was very welcome to the Hatter. So much gratuitous advice of one kind or another had been given to him that it seemed evident he was not regarded as one to be trusted wtth the spending of money. Chloe and Phyllis and the rest had evidently undermined the public estimate of his ability to handle cash. It needed much patience in dealing with the Hatter in

these days. He was beset by a score of schemes, each as visionary as the other, and would present himself at the aunts' home even on that domestic *dies non*, the washing-day, with the customary, "Look here, Miss Cherry, what d'you think of this?" He had a scheme dubbed "The Guild of Beneficent Landlords," that he worked out in a prospectus of many folios, only to abandon reluctantly when Cherry poured the cold water of her practical mind on its terms and conditions.

"You see," she said, pointing her dexter finger at him, regardless of her aunts' homilies on manners, "what you're trying to do is to make people good from outside, and you can't do it!"—this with the emphasis of the female mind. "No one can do it! You've just got to be good from the inside. If every one was good from the inside there wouldn't be any trouble at all."

"I reckon," remarked the Hatter with a drawl, "it would be a mighty slow world. When God made original sin he put the pepper into life."

"Oh dear me! What is the good of arguing with you? You want to make every one happy, and yet you want to keep sin!"

"Well just a spice, you know," he pleaded apologetically. "A smack of it—to give flavour to things."

"And yet make every one happy?"

"Seems to me," said the Hatter luminously, "sin's a sort of essential to human happiness. You can't make a picture with all high lights, Miss Cherry—can't do it. Think of the heaps of chaps who get real downright happiness out of just nosing out other chaps' sins. Seems to me, Miss Cherry," and he caught her by the sleeve to emphasize his words, "seems to me there were real points of happiness in that chap, the Pharisee. He recognized sin in his fellow-man—and he was happy. Take away the pepper, and you

rob that chap of the sunlight of life." He had a way of dropping into poetical diction.

"I can't help you a bit. There! It's just no use. You haven't any sort of first principles to go on that I can see. You're all for goodness one moment, and all for sin the next——."

"Sort of blend like tea—give it aroma, flavour," he interjected staccato.

"It's just no use!"—and Cherry threw up her hands in despair. "You usen't to worry like this when you had no money."

"No," said the Hatter. "Seems to me the only sort of scheme of universal happiness is a cemetery. Reckon I'll have to lay it out on a cemetery."

"What about the tombstones?" she laughed.

"All have the same kind and two lines of poetry each—my own."

"Alas poor ghosts!" And she left the Hatter pondering her words.

CHAPTER VII

BEFORE the boy came, two years of married life had passed. Geoffrey by that time had arrived at the stage of welcoming the daily return to business, and regarding the evening home-going as a duty to be evaded, when possible, on plausible pretext.

The boy's coming changed all that. Geoffrey even came home early when he could manage to do so, in order to catch him with the nurse before he was put in his cot for the night; and never a night passed but he had a glimpse at him and pressed his lips on the child's soft cheek.

The development of the baby was a fairy-tale to Geoffrey, and he could have served out golden coins of sympathy to his wife about their little one if she had asked for exchange in the matter. She did not. To Carrie infantile progression was a commonplace. All babies grew, developed in limb, and said "Goo!" and at the appointed time made a change in their dietary scale. Geoffrey's tentative gropings after sympathy were promptly snubbed, till he grew to be ashamed of marvelling at this wonder—this little son of his—expanding into life like the growth of a flower. He even felt that the nurse regarded him with a sort of compassionate contempt, as if he were something exceptional in the masculine way.

He looked forward with impatience to the day when the child would reach the age of companionship—the day when he would trot by his father's side, and they two could find

in simple pleasures what his nature yearned for. Geoffrey was finding out through the tiny life committed to him that neither riches nor ambition, neither the battle of life nor its conquest could eliminate the craving of humanity within him, the desire to love, to be loved. All that was best in him he would give to the boy. He did not see what was evident to all others—the child's want of stamina, want of the virility that goes to the making of a robust, manly lad. "He will grow out of this lassitude, this want of vigour," he declared to himself. He desired him above all things to be a man—a man in the full masculine sense of the word. Always intolerant of the effeminate in his sex, he maintained a constant feud with Carrie on the subject of the boy's clothing, as he grew with the years out of infancy into childhood. One day he came home to find Geoffrey the younger arrayed in a costume after Carrie's own heart—a brown velvet suit, with a fine lace collar, and a scarlet ribbon round his waist. The child's hair had been twisted into what resembled a row of carpenter's shavings, and a tired, bloodless little face looked out patiently on the circle of adoring women who surrounded him. They called him "Beautiful!" "Darling!" "A little picture!" and described him by other similar terms of appreciation. When they were alone, Carrie made him stand in front of his father—hopeful for the appreciation of this wonderful sartorial effort.

"Poor old boy!" said Geoffrey with a sigh. And that was all the appreciation he gave her.

Daily the Crœsus Consols yielded up its riches, and increased the sum of Geoffrey's wealth; whilst day by day, keeping pace with it, Carrie expanded in ostentatious display. She became the Lady Bountiful of the city; the guineas so easily come by went as easily. Not a subscription list, for whatever cause, but included her name. As she

crowned the social circle of the city, so she moved a gilded saint in the odour of sanctity. To the rector she was a very present help in time of trouble. He had but to appeal to her—"We have again to rely on your generous sympathy in our pressing need for new surplices for the choir"—and she answered with a cheque.

To Geoffrey's wealth was added the fortune of her father. The Captain had been gathered to his forbears somewhat prematurely. The habits of his later life did not conduce to longevity. An apoplectic fit reduced him to physical helplessness; a second relieved him of the life that had become an intolerable burden; but to the last he gloried in the triumph of his daughter. Her many social engagements claimed so much of her time that Carrie in the years preceding his death saw little of him; but to the last the favourite reading of the old man was made up from the paragraphs in the *Daily Miner*, *The Golden Tribune*, and the other newspapers of the city, chronicling her doings and givings.

And when at last he went down to the burial-place, she mourned for him in the deepest mourning, exhausting the list of her draper's sable emblems.

CHAPTER VIII

BARLOW laughed as he had not laughed since his boyhood. It was the lawn at the back of Lyall's house, and the little Doctor stood on it stripped to his pants and singlet, barefooted, red-faced, perspiring, but triumphant. Taking his ease on the grass was a big hulking miner, good-humoured of face and brawny as Hercules himself.

"Jock and I," explained Lyall to Barlow, who had arrived at the close of an athletic contest between the giant and the Doctor—"Jock and I have been wrestling for a fee. He beat me at Cornish, beat me at Lancashire and Westmoreland, but I had you, Jock my man, at Græco-Roman. It's all very well for you big chaps so long as it's sheer strength; but when it's skill," said the Doctor, strutting up and down, still flushed with victory—"when it's skill, we chaps come in. Have at you again, friend Jock?" And the little man posed.

But Jock only grinned pleasantly and shook his head.

"¡Well, well! that clears off Sally's mumps, and the rest of it. It's worth a guinea or two, Jock, to take the bad pride out of you. You fellows, all brawn, beef, and muscle, want letting down now and again! Come along, Barlow; let us go inside. Decent fellow Jock—best wrestler in the place; but the Græco-Roman fixed him!" And the Doctor beamed with delight.

To Barlow at the moment he looked more like an overgrown schoolboy than a professional man.

"You're a mad sort of chap, Lyall! What in Heaven's name do you mean by it all?"

"Pooh!" said the Doctor a little testily. "Why, can't a fellow have a bit of fun now and then?"

"There's a sort of dignity they expect, you know!"

"Damn!" said Lyall, shortly.

But Jock didn't worry about the dignity. He'd have gone through fire and water for the man who spent long hours by the side of the sick-bed and settled the fee in a fall or two.

"Well, what brings you here at this time of day, ten o'clock in the morning, friend Barlow? Don't want me, do you?"

"Well, not professionally; but I do in another way."

The Doctor had resumed his garments, and they made their way to the consulting-room.

"I'm in a bit of a fix, Lyall, and can't see my way out of it."

"La femme?" said Lyall, raising his eyebrows—"at your age, my son?"

"Yes and no. It's not my affair. It's just a bit of a muddle, and I can't see my way out of it."

"Well, I should say you are not the sort of man to commit yourself in writing, and yet you're just the sort of man to make a fool of yourself about a woman. Men who depreciate women generally fall into their hands in the long run."

"Oh! it's not my case at all."

"Well, well, what is it all about?"

"You know, or rather you knew, the Hatter?"

"The 'Mother Celestine' man."

"Yes. He's dead."

"Dead is he?"

"Died yesterday afternoon. Sent for me to make his will—and the rest."

"I surmise the rest is the interesting part."

"Look here, Lyall, light your pipe and I'll tell you the whole story."

The Doctor did so and settled down in a roomy chair.

"You do not remember Colonel Hilliard; he was before your time, but you must have heard of him."

"Oh yes; the aunts keep his memory green."

"Well, the Colonel and I were close friends. I was, I believe, the only confidant he had; and he let me see a chapter in his life kept even from his sisters. It was an unhappy business and left its mark on the old gentleman. It went back to the beginning of his life here. When the sisters joined him it was understood that he was a widower. The wife died, so it was given out, whilst on a visit to her people. The facts, however, appear to have been these: the Colonel, I imagine, though the truest-hearted man in the world, was a bit of a martinet in his own home—forgot perhaps to leave the soldier at the barracks. However that may have been, his matrimonial campaign ended in disaster."

"The very ordinary commonplace story, I suppose?"

"Poor Hilliard, yes! When he discovered it he quietly sent her away under cover of a visit to her folk. As a matter of fact she gave him the slip, and joined the man in a neighbouring colony. They were together for some time when Nemesis turned the tables. He deserted her. She had pluck and pride of a sort, and made a fight of it. The picture of it all—for a child was born in the midst of her trouble—so moved the old Colonel when he related the story to me that—well, I shall not forget it to my dying day. Why is it, Lyall, that some men so set themselves

about with points and barbs and the rest that the sensitive love-craving hearts of them wither from sheer want of sympathy?"

"My dear fellow, a man doesn't dig up the roots of himself, and offer them for sale, like a bunch of herbs!"

"Well, in the end her pride gave way. He—the man—had written to her. Felt mean, I suppose, and asked her to join him in 'Frisco. He promised money, but it did not come. Till the child was born she sent no answer; then she forgot herself—looking at the little baby face, I suppose—and wrote to him. One can imagine the letter, Lyall!"

Lyall twisted in his chair as if the words hurt him. "The unhappy woman! A dog of hell, Barlow—to leave her—to leave her then."

"He wasn't altogether bad, Lyall. He scraped what he had together to return. It wasn't enough, and he lost it in a gambling den. Odd sort of stakes men play for sometimes. However, he lost it. He did return years afterwards: the woman was dead and no trace of the child remained. What happened in the meantime was this. The mother, in the extremity of poverty and on her deathbed, sent a message to the Colonel. He came with the promptitude of a soldier and the generosity of a gentleman. She was dead when he arrived. He buried her and took the child away with him. There was a woman who had practically managed the house during the wife's time. She married a Sergeant in the regiment, and then the Colonel closed up the place and went into barracks. She too had a child about the same age as the other youngster. The Colonel fixed up a compact with them by which they sent their own little one to some relatives and substituted the other for her. They were both girls."

"Do you tell me, Barlow, that this woman—the

Sergeant's wife—deliberately sent her own child packing, and took in this other child?"

"Well, that's what happened. It seems odd, unnatural; but the Sergeant had been under the Colonel for years—fought under him in India, I believe—owed his life to him in some way, it was said. But the Colonel wasn't the man to talk about that sort of thing."

"Don't believe it!" interjected Lyall abruptly. "You've been told it, that's all; but I know it's a lie!"

"How?"

"I know it, Barlow, in a way you can't. There are things that don't happen. That's one of them."

Barlow shrugged his shoulders. "I can only tell the story as it was told me."

"Oh, that's all right; it isn't true, all the same. But go on."

"Well," said Barlow, with a sigh for the perversity of the little Doctor, "that's pretty well all there is to tell."

"What became of the girl?"

"If you don't believe in the substitution, well I don't know."

"Oh, very well, have it your own way. Let's say for the sake of argument, it happened. All the same, I don't believe it."

"The Colonel was no liar, Doctor. It happened right enough."

David grunted. "Well, what else?"

"She grew up as their daughter, believing as she had every reason to believe, they were her parents. Then the wife died, and some years later the Sergeant also."

"Well?"

"The Colonel issued orders to his sisters, the Misses Hilliard, to adopt her as a sort of serving-maid or

companion. I never knew exactly the nature of the contract. However, she has become practically a younger sister."

The Doctor's pipe had gone out. There was a pause in the story. He filled it in with a word—"Cherry!"

Barlow nodded. "I heard the sequel last night, Lyall. The Hatter, after years of coming and going among the dead shafts round his hut, fell down one in the dark the night before last,—went thumping down thirty feet. About ten o'clock in the morning a lad heard the sound of moaning—thought it was a stray whim horse he said, but wasn't sure. Anyhow they lowered a man down to see and found the old Hatter. They got him to his hut. He wouldn't go to the hospital at any price. As he said, the whistle had sounded for knock-off time. We sent for you, but you were out and before we could get another man it was too late. I was with him till late in the afternoon when he died. Hateful sight to see a man die in agony! Poor old Hatter! He had repented of his sins for many a long year, and had sought peace in a return to primitive simplicity. But I don't think, Lyall, it was ever more than a seeming peace. He let it all out yesterday. In and out of the Hatter's solitary days was woven the thread of that unhappy woman's wrecked life."

The Doctor interjected, "You're not quite clear, Barlow. Was he—the Hatter—the 'other man'?"

"Yes; that is what I was coming to. He was Hawkins' younger brother. I believe he was a wild, dashing youngster in his time—the sort that attracts that kind of woman."

"Do you say that he never knew Cherry was his child?"

"Never. The Colonel kept his secret to himself. You must remember that till the Celestine affair long after the Colonel's death the Hatter—well, was simply the Hatter, and to him Cherry was the aunt's companion."

"Odd that a father and a child should come together as they did and not know the relationship."

"Why should they? How could they? There is no occult attraction in the blood tie, is there?"

"Perhaps."

"At all events it conveys no definite knowledge of its existence to the parties concerned."

"No; one can't see how it could."

"However, the Hatter made a will yesterday. He left all he had and I find it is a 'pile.' You know what the 'Mother Celestine' is. He is the owner of a third interest, and he left it all to his natural child. Failing the establishment of the child's claim it will go to his next of kin."

"Who's the next of kin?"

"Mrs. Merton. There were but the two brothers and she is the only surviving child of the elder."

"I see. But there is no difficulty in establishing his daughter's identity?"

"Not with the documents left by the Colonel. I can prove it up to the hilt."

"Cherry, Cherry!" said Lyall softly.

"I think you understand, Lyall, what it will mean; you know the girl as well as I do—better. What troubles me, old man, is this. I can put all this money in her hands, but I can't do it without bringing shame to her and pain to the old aunts for the betrayal of their hero. I wonder what it's worth, Lyall, to a woman—this bar sinister business? I suppose it has its equivalent in cash; most things have."

"Depends on the woman," said Lyall. "It all depends on your woman."

"And the sum total?" added Barlow.

"Hang the sum total!"

"After all, it's only a sentiment."

"Look here, Barlow, you may in your profession see some sides of life, mostly seamy I should think, but in ours we see all sides. The man who eliminates sentiment from his estimate of life—well, he's an ass, an egregious ass."

"Marriage is a social convention, Doctor."

"That may be; but you can't eliminate in a day a social convention that has knit the family together for centuries."

"Well, I suppose there's no choice in the matter."

The Doctor was silent and brooded, then broke out in his impetuous way—

"Look here, Barlow. You, and now I, since you have told me the story, are the only ones who know where the Hatter's child is to be found. If we keep our mouths shut, then no dog can bark. That's not Shakespeare, I know, but it fits the case. I want you to give her the choice."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean this. Can't you understand what it is to rip out all the little home thoughts, the home loves, the home purity, all the goodness of life from a girl's soul? Why, hang it, I'm only a man!"—and David rubbed his sandy hair with his hand in a desperately troubled sort of way, speaking half in deprecation, half in appeal—"I'm only a man; and yet to think of a smudge on the dear old mater's name, to think it just possible! Why, old chap, it would kill me! Ah, Barlow, don't you see—don't you see what it means?"

"Yes," replied William the materialist, "I see all right. It's the loss of a cool—goodness knows how much. You can't weigh a sentiment against a mountain of shekels, Lyall."

"I'm going to try anyhow. Let her have the choice, Barlow. Give me your hand on it."

"But you said a minute ago you didn't believe the yarn about the substitution."

"It's dead against human nature, Barlow, dead against it; but there are sports, you know, sports off the normal line. There's always the abnormal factor to reckon with."

"There's plenty of the abnormal in human nature, Lyall. You doctors may be safe enough on the physical side, but we see more of that other life you can't reach with a knife or dose with a potion. I have not a doubt about it."

"Well, I don't think it is true; but it may be—yes, it may be, so I want your word."

Barlow hesitated. It seemed to him a silly sort of proceeding. The girl was either entitled to the money or she was not. How could you settle a matter of right by a choice? How the deuce medical men get along with minds capable of that sort of confusion passed his understanding. He temporized.

"Supposing a choice were possible, Lyall, how could she make it without exposing the whole business, and then the mischief is done?"

"Oh, leave that to me!" said David largely. "Where there's a will there's a way."

"I'm afraid," commented Barlow dubiously, stroking his chin, "that where there's a will, duly attested, there is only one way. A man's will is a sacred instrument in law."

"A woman's way knows no law but its own, Barlow. There is nothing sacred to it."

"I'll admit you can't cite precedents to her—with impunity." He rose and put on his hat.

"You agree, then?"

"Confound you, David Lyall, perhaps——"

"Yes?"

"Well there then, yes! if you can find a way to do it and I'll bet you can't."

"Can't? You've no imagination, Barlow—you've killed it with law."

"That's all you know about it. There's more imagination in a bill of costs than you can dream of, my son. Good-night!"

CHAPTER IX

THEY were seated under Auntie Tod's favourite apple tree. The warm spring afternoon made the shade of its abundant leafage acceptable. Around it the ground was powdered with the petals of fallen blossoms. At this time of the year it was their favourite spot for afternoon tea. Auntie Tod, who had been busy planting out seedlings, rested from her labours; her capacious mushroom hat lay on the grass with a trowel at its side. Aunt Felicia was filling the teacups at the gipsy-table, her knitting in her lap. Cherry sat on the ground with the trunk of the apple tree for support, hatless as usual, for thus she went about the old home regardless of heat or cold, secure in the thick mass of her brown hair.

The death of the Hatter had brought, at least to one household, a sense of loss. Last spring he had sat with them beneath that self-same apple tree, pouring into their ears his fantastic notions of a new society, a new world, where, as Aunt Felicia dryly remarked, "every one was to be born again, free and equal."

They were discussing him, retelling his oft-told tales, his quaint fancies, his half-shrewd, half-simple schemes.

"I think," remarked Aunt Tod with unusual courage, for she rarely ventured on an original remark, "I think he must have been wild when he was young. He wanted to do every one so much good, he must have done some one a great wrong years ago. That's how I would feel, I

think, if I had been wild. I'd want so dreadfully to make up for it."

Aunt Felicia's flashing needles stopped. The elder sister stared amazed at the younger.

"Tod, are you out of your senses? What put such an idea into your head?"

She evidently thought her dignity would suffer if she pursued the matter further, so gathering up the ball of wool, rose and crossed to the house.

"You dear old darling," said Cherry, taking Aunt Tod's fat hand and patting it. "You're always in disgrace."

"Oh, Cherry, there's the Doctor!" said Aunt Tod. "I'm not fit to be seen. Felicia says I am always disgracing the family; but it's so hard to be very tidy and do the garden at the same time. I'll send you out fresh tea." And Aunt Tod departed in confusion, like a child caught in mischief.

"Good afternoon," said the Doctor, shaking Cherry's hand and then sinking with a sigh of comfort into Aunt Tod's capacious basket-chair.

"A woman and an apple tree suggest Paradise, don't they?"

"I shouldn't have thought that episode one a man would care to recall."

"My dear Miss Maywood, they went out hand-in-hand. Adam I believe tilled; what Eve did I don't seem to remember—what did she do?"

"Boiled the domestic billy I suppose, Doctor! That was her part of the penalty and has been ever since."

"Put into colloquial phrase, depolarized as it were; perhaps that's about it. May I have a cup of tea?"

"There's a fresh pot coming for you. Here is Bridget with it."

"Sad news about your old friend the Hatter?"

"Yes. It was almost like losing one of our own kin. Aunt Felicia had a great respect for him; as for myself, he was a very dear old friend. He was a good man, Doctor."

"We are all good more or less, Miss Cherry; or if you like it better we are all bad, more or less."

"We were talking about him only a few minutes ago. Auntie Tod made such a quaint remark."

"Peradventure there is more in Auntie Tod than Auntie Felicia dreams of."

"Yes; I sometimes think there is. She said that men like our old friend who tried to do good often did it as a sort of attempted recompense for the past."

"Did she?" said David; and he took some time to drink his tea.

"What do you think?"

"Oh, I don't know; I've heard of that sort of thing. It's what people do when they cheat the railway folk and pay the fare ten years afterwards, without interest. It doesn't seem to me—then I'm not a moral philosopher, you know—that you ever can recompense, just because you can't tell the loss or the gain. The railway chaps might have made a good thing out of the lost fare, or perhaps they might have fooled with it and made a prodigious loss. You see you might have injured them on the one hand or saved a rash spec. on the other. More tea, please. The metaphysical realm is wrapped in a Scotch mist. Two lumps of sugar, please. I'm a very boy for sugar. What's this you are reading?" and he picked up a book that lay on the grass. "One of the aunts' sermons?"

"Well, a missionary book written years ago. Aunt Felicia was improving our minds with extracts from a chapter on Polynesian myths and fables."

"Hum!" grunted the Doctor. He was not in what might be called close touch with the missionary.

"It is very interesting, Doctor."

"Is it?" he replied, in a tone suggestive of doubt.

"Aunt Felicia has ideas."

"The feminine substitute for facts, I suppose," said Lyall dryly.

Cherry laughed good-naturedly.

"The particular idea to-day was that poetry has its roots in Nature. She says that what we call civilization is killing the poetry of life—for every day it is carrying us further away from Nature."

"Well, there's some truth in that," assented Lyall; "but how does the missionary-man help her?"

"Oh, she was using the chapter on fables by way of illustration. She says all spiritual life has its book in Nature, and poetry is just its human reading. There is a great deal of beauty in some of these old fables. Will you listen while I tell you one?"

"If you put it in your own words, Miss Cherry—peace to the missionary-man."

"Well I'll try. Let me think"—she paused. "This is a favourite with me. Listen! Once upon a time—to use the dear old phrase—Ina, the moon, took to herself a mortal husband. He was a great Chief in the Islands. One cloudless night, when Ina cast her long path on the sea, she had seen him asleep in his canoe. He had been fishing off the reef, and, carried by a current to sea, had outworn himself in the attempt to paddle home again. Exhausted, he resigned himself to death and lay in the canoe in the deep sleep of utter weariness. He was young, handsome, human, and Ina's cold heart longed for the warmth of human companionship, human love. So as he slept she drew him to her by silver cords along the path the moon spreads to earth. She had made that path all the years past in the hope that some day her heart would be warmed

by the coming of a lover whom she could draw close to her. But never till this night had the lover come. Many times Ina had prayed to Vari, the great Mother of All, to send her this lover. But Vari had not hearkened to her prayer. To-night, however, Vari inclined to Ina and said, 'This is your lover! He is young, a brave man and true—Ina, draw him to your heart.' So Ina drew him up the white, pure path to her heart. When he woke from his long sleep it was to find her bending over him, and as he looked up in the face of Ina as she rose in the East, it was flushed with the warmth of love. For many years they lived together husband and wife. At the rising and the setting she lay in his arms, glad of the glow of human love at her heart. Then, with the man's hand in hers, she drew him into the white radiance of her soul, when she shed its light upon the earth. Ina was ever the same, but the man changed; as the years passed he left youth behind him, all the splendour of his form and strength departed. He became an old man and feeble. Still Ina, the ever-beautiful, the never-changing, held him to her for the love they bore each other. At length death came near to the man, and Ina in grief drew the curtains of cloud across the sky, and hid herself from the world. Then Vari spoke to her and said, 'Ina, my daughter, give back to the earth that which belongs to the earth. The man will surely die.' Then Ina drew the clouds, the heavy, tear-laden clouds, still closer round her, and the sea became dark and sullen, for the path of Ina no longer shone on it. She took the old man, who had been her young lover, in her arms and said to him, 'My beloved, we must part. Vari has said it. The things of the earth go back to the earth. Kiss me.' And he raised his faded face to hers, with the light in his eyes of love that never dies, is never buried. Then Ina embraced him again, as, lifting the withered body in her strong white arms, she pressed

it close to her heart. The clouds broke, the sweet rain fell on sea and land, and Ina—the light of her face fading as the great sun rose in morning glory—placed the man, her husband, on the arc of a rainbow that spanned the sky. For a moment she held him there as a babe in a cradle, then kissed him on the lips. 'This take to earth, my beloved, this, which suffers neither death nor burial, the love of wife, the love of Ina the Moon.' Then she saw him carried on the great arc till he reached the earth. Thus came love, the love of Ina, the love of wife,--surviving youth, the change of years, the ashes of passion,—to the earth."

"Thanks." Lyall was moved by the quaint fancy and the suggestion of a spiritual depth he had never before sounded in the woman he had grown to love. With it came also the realization of how much that love meant to him.

The afternoon was closing in, but the Doctor was loth to leave. Cherry leant back in the chair clasping her hands behind her head. The Doctor gave his attention to the garden, rioting in the reckless abundance of spring. The petals of the apple-blossoms fluttered down in the air. At length David broke the contemplative silence.

"I've a sort of fable of my own," he said. "Once upon a time a man—just the ordinary sort of man, meet them every day—went out to woo."

"To what?"

"To woo! Sounds like some sort of bird, doesn't it?" said David, feebly. "Well, this fellow hadn't learned the way to woo."

"Surely he had the wit to woo!" she laughed.

David laughed too, and taking off his spectacles rubbed them meditatively with his handkerchief. "He was just an ordinary fellow, this chap. I think I've said that."

"Yes, I've concluded he was neither a god nor a fairy prince."

"Did I mention that he was rather short of cash?"

"Well, I don't remember the item."

"He was. He was always either short of cash or in the future infinitive mood."

"What sort of a mood is that?"

"It is familiar to grammarians and others like this chap—I am short of cash; I am about to be short of cash. This chap was always short *in esse* or *in futuro;* whichever way you took him he was short."

"It's to be hoped he didn't apply the principle to his wooing."

"No; that's the paradox. When one is short in cash one has to make the engagement at a long date."

"Oh!"

"That's the fable."

"What's the fable? There's no fable about it."

"No, dear, there isn't. It's just true, Cherry—couldn't be truer. I love you, sweetheart—not the way of the poets—never could understand them, dear—couldn't write a verse to save my life; but I know I love you all the same."

Cherry felt her face growing tense.

"Suppose I were just to say it in my own way?" He leant forward. "Suppose I were to say, Cherry, that I wanted a mate, dear—that I wanted you—that no one else in all the world would do me but you." He rose and stood behind her chair, leaning over the bent head with its crowning glory. "Cherry, I want you; I want you, dear. I've nothing to give you but a poor man's love, his loyalty, his life." The hands had unclasped and were hiding her face. Did he hear aright?

"David! David!"

He drew them gently away and the sweet face looked

up at him; and for David the light of heaven shone in it, for it was lighted by the soul of the woman he loved.

"I will give," she said—half in laughter, half in happy tears—"that man in the poor little fable a bill at a long, long date."

"He'll save like a miser, the beggar," answered David between whiles, for they did as happy lovers do the world over.

CHAPTER X

"IT is an altogether brilliant idea, Barlow."

"My dear Doctor, you forget I've had some experience of your brilliant ideas—they generally lack financial backbone."

"Oh, this is quite different. It isn't a hospital or an asylum or anything of the old kind; it doesn't mean cash. You'll just have to draw a cheque on your imagination, Barlow."

"I'm afraid it will stand a poor chance of being honoured. But what's the new bee in your bonnet?"

"You remember your promise the other day?"

"The Hatter's affair?"

"Yes. I've repented it ever since, Lyall. Sentiment and business are like oil and water—they won't mix."

"The oil of sentiment comes on top, anyhow."

"You reach the cold water of business later on. Let it go its way. Every departure from the beaten track is dangerous. It leads you into deception, lies, and that sort of thing."

"Oh, there's no leading about this idea. It's going to be a lie straight out. Some men are born liars; others, with diligence, achieve lying. I understand that to be possible—and still others have lies thrust on them. Now I'm going to thrust a lie on you."

Barlow rose. "Go away, man! It is a fine day; go out and kill some one, with a pill or a potion—it is your trade."

"My dear fellow, I'm in deadly earnest." (Barlow grinned.) "You'll find out what I mean."

"Go away, man, go away! It is Sunday morning. I would be alone with melancholy; it is an inheritance I have from my forbears."

"Will you join me in a call on the aunts this evening, when the aunts will be out? Then we'll stay for supper. It's quite a long time since we've had supper there. I'll call for you, and explain the scheme on the way. I've thought it all out, Barlow; it's a lovely idea."

Barlow promised, though reluctantly, and the Doctor left him and got into his buggy to make the round of morning calls that must be gone through week-day or Sunday.

There was still a touch of chill in the evening air, making the fire in the dining-room acceptable. The aunts, as the Doctor had anticipated, were at church whilst Cherry kept house. The three gathered round the roomy fireplace. Barlow's melancholy had seemingly departed with the setting of the sun, for he was as merry as the younger two, and they were merry as crickets—if noise be an index to a merry heart.

"Do you know, Cherry,"—there was quite a big space between them and Barlow, and an inconsiderable space between themselves—"do you know, Barlow is writing a story?"

"A story, Mr. Barlow—a story!"

Barlow growled something. It was inarticulate, probably something remote from a blessing on the Doctor's head.

"Oh yes," continued Lyall; "it's a real rippin' affair. He told me all about it and wanted advice; didn't you, old chap?"

Barlow was dumb.

"You see, our friend suffers from—what shall I call it? —*lacunæ*, in his life, missing passages. He's never been in love."

Cherry was on the point of a laughing comment, but she looked across at Barlow and forbore.

The Doctor, all unobservant, rattled on. "So, you see, he wanted me to fill in the *lacunæ;* tell him, in short, what a given sort of girl would do under a given set of circumstances."

"Well?" said Cherry.

"Of course I couldn't; there are no formulæ in these matters. She might do—well, she might do anything. Suppose you help him."

"What is the trouble?" said Cherry.

"Well, you see; it's just this. Barlow has got his heroine into such a fix that if he is to bring her out with all the trappings of riches galore he's got to—— Look here, old man, suppose you tell it yourself; you know the story better than I do."

Barlow, with a sigh of despair, took the evident cue.

"It is this, Miss Cherry—what are riches worth to a woman?"

"In what way?"

"It's a sort of dilemma," interposed Lyall, sagely.

"Perhaps," continued Barlow, "I'd better put it in the form of a case—A. B."

"A. B.?"

"That's Barlow's way, Cherry; all humanity to the poor man is either A. B. or C. D."

"Well, perhaps it may be clearer if we call them John Doe and Elizabeth Roe. Well, once upon a time, John Doe, a young man of indifferent lineage, ran away with Elizabeth Roe, the wife of a nobleman, deserted her before their little daughter Elspeth came into the world and did

not return for many years. Meantime the mother died, and Elspeth was brought up by some humble folk as their own child. They were, we will say, foresters, living in a wood where the wild boar is hunted as a means of livelihood."

Lyall interposed, "In those days—this is a sort of mediæval romance—boar's head was in demand at the castle; the nobles lived largely on boar's head."

"Now," continued Barlow, "Elspeth Roe grew into a beauteous maiden."

"She was exceedingly good to look upon, and altogether comely. Comeliness is essential to the mediæval maiden."

"Do let Mr. Barlow go on. It is his story," remonstrated Cherry.

"Well, as I said, she was a beauteous maiden. Now Elspeth had more than graces of person, for she was deeply attached to her foster parents, and when, she being yet a child, they died, she dearly cherished the memory of their care. Indeed, of all her thoughts, and she had many, there were none sweeter to her than those recalling the days she had spent in the forest with the old couple, whom she had learned to love as father and mother."

"No other thoughts could have replaced them," added Lyall; "none."

"None," she repeated.

"Well," resumed Barlow, "the real father had been abroad at the wars. There were always wars in those days; you could have your choice of a dozen. He returned war-stained, weary and fallen into years. At the sacking of a great city he had succeeded in carrying away a rich booty of diamonds and pearls, amethysts, emeralds, ornaments of gold and silver, in fact everything that a woman desires."

"This was in the dark ages, of course, Cherry," interpolated the Doctor.

"But there was no light on his hearth, no woman in his home, and so he bethought him of the daughter he had never seen."

"Did he find her?"

"Well, that is not essential to the story. He died; but not before consulting a wise man. We will call him Merlin, and he charged Merlin to continue the quest for the lost daughter. Merlin found her, but being a man who had lived remote from women he took into his counsel a certain stripling. He explained to this stripling that in bestowing on her all the riches of the real father, he would bring shame—the shame of her mother—to the daughter. And Merlin asked the stripling would this weigh against the diamond, the pearl, the ruby and the amethyst? Putting it all in a nutshell, Miss Cherry, I am—being of the world, worldly—puzzled as to what Merlin should do. Would Elspeth, the pure of heart, set the weight of jewels, riches, houses, lands, the whole world's gear, against the purity of her mother, the loss of her trust, her faith in wedded love, all the sweet memories of her childhood? Would she?"

"Just think, Cherry," broke in Lyall with boyish eagerness, "if you were that woman, that Elspeth, remembering all they were to you, the old couple, would you destroy the memory and replace it with that other? Would you do it for diamonds or pearls, for all the riches of the world? Put it into your own life, as it were. That's the way to help him. Remembering the love they gave you, the sacrifices they made for you, their pinched lives, the little gifts purchased at the cost of self——"

"Ah! Mr. Barlow, you do not know what it meant—what it means? Take my own life, if you will. Do you think I could ever forget it; ever be disloyal to them—father, mother? Never a day but father remembered me

with some little thing a child loves. He was out in the cold of winter, the heat of summer, Napoleon and he, working always for us—mother and me."

Her voice broke; and for a space they heard no sound but the tinkle of burning wood falling on the hearth. Then she took courage again.

"I sometimes dream of it, David——"

Barlow became conscious of a new development in the use of the Christian name.

"Dream that I am back again in the dear little kitchen. Mother is wondering if father and Napoleon are doing well that day. A good day was so much to her. It would have been far harder but for the dear old Colonel who helped us."

"Good man the Colonel, eh?" queried Barlow, with a glance at her.

"None better; but he was not father, good as he was. David! the people used to laugh at the dear old dad; to them he was just a mountebank, but to us he was everything that made our lives. They didn't know—couldn't know—the love he carried in his heart for us." There was a catch half sob, in her voice. David took her hand and patted it.

"Cherry, dear, you forget it is only a story; only Barlow's heroine in his—his tiresome story: confound it!"

She struggled to laugh it off. Barlow insisted.

"But, Miss Cherry, you haven't told us yet what she would do. I want to know what would Elspeth do—change it all for that other and the riches?"

"Do? Do? Sell all that, the memory of all that—think it was all a trick, a play, a mere pretending, and that they knew it was not true—that it was just something paid for? David, isn't he a foolish man?"

"Barlow, you are the essence of folly."

"But you haven't told me yet, Miss Cherry?"

"David, you tell him for me."

"Yes, of course I will, sweetheart—and that's what she is to me, Barlow, and the dearest sweetheart in the world. She wouldn't sell that memory in which she roots her trust in the goodness of life—sell her faith in purity and honour for all the mines in Christendom, for all the jewels of Aladdin's cave."

"Dear me!" said Barlow, with elevated eyebrows. "That's very fine, sir; very fine! So much high sentiment in a wicked world—one doesn't expect it!"

"It's just the unexpected that happens. One never realizes the sentimental possibilities in the chap next door. We are all potential sentimentalists, and the man who denies it is so—is just sitting on his safety valve."

Barlow smiled at the sermonette. Then Lyall took Cherry by the hand, and the pair of sentimentalists stood before the grizzled old man of law.

"We are engaged, Cherry and I; engaged to be married some day, at more than sixty days' sight," with a sigh. "Some day, when we can fix that financial backbone you spoke of, Barlow."

Barlow rose, and taking a hand of each, gripped it. He wished them a benediction, but could not bring it to his lips. They understood. As Cherry afterwards remarked to David, he suffered from suppressed sentiment, and as with measles in like condition, the suppression only intensifies the disease.

"Well, we've fixed up your heroine," remarked Lyall cheerfully, as the door-bell sounded the return of the aunts, cold as to their noses, pious as to their thoughts, and most hospitably inclined.

That evening they drank a toast—at least all but two drank it.

Barlow went home alone. He got tired of waiting for

Lyall, who took the deuce and all of a time helping Cherry to fasten the latch of the gate, an altogether foolish proceeding, for it had to be unlatched again to let the Doctor out.

So he smoked a cigar, and when it was finished and he had turned into bed, reflected on what an amazing thing life was; that people who ought to know better could fool away money for a domestic sentiment that was somehow associated in his mind with bread and butter and porridge and milk. "Give me beef and a banking account," he said to himself as he drifted into sleep.

CHAPTER XI

WHEN Lyall, after dinner, called at Barlow's rooms to smoke a pipe with him, he found "Billy" in evening dress, a conventional attire he rarely favoured.

"What, Philosopher! Go you into the mad world to-night?"

"To speak the honest truth, Lyall, I'd rather face a funeral, and that's but a sorry entertainment."

"Off to the Mertons', I suppose?"

"Yes! Wish they wouldn't ask me. I'm no earthly use in that sort of galley."

"Haven't seen you since the night of the story. By the way, what a capital liar you are."

Barlow twisted uneasily in his lounge-chair.

"I don't like this fairy-tale sort of business, Doctor. It's no more in my line than the dance."

"Well, you will let the matter of the lost heiress rest? That's the main thing."

"Rest! Why, man, you don't know what a will is. I'll have to advertise far and wide."

"What?"

"Must! Can't help myself. You don't think I could destroy it? There are the witnesses—two of them both being present, and the rest of it. I can do nothing till two years have elapsed, so the Hatter stipulated."

"I thought it was a bargain, Barlow."

"The choice you mean?"

"Of course!" The Doctor showed ominous signs of an outburst.

"Of course," repeated Barlow mechanically. "There's been the choice for what it's worth."

"For what it's worth?" Lyall bristled like a terrier at sight of a rat.

"It's all foolish, supremely foolish sentiment," said Barlow wearily. "Don't fume, Lyall, there's a good chap. This confusion of business and sentiment is enough to drive a man mad."

The Doctor glared at him over the rim of his spectacles, his face red with anger.

"You seemed as keen on it as I the other night."

"Perhaps—perhaps I was at the time," and he pursed his lips doubtfully. "A woman, the domestic hearth, a weak man. I am but human, Doctor."

"Why, man, you almost made her swear it!"

"Hum! did I? Force of habit"—with a sigh—"force of habit. I never met a man like you, Lyall; you are corroded with crude sentiment; eaten through and through by it. You'll die in the poorhouse if you escape our equivalent for Colney Hatch; and to die a poor man, Lyall, is to be utterly damned by one's relatives."

"After all, what proof have you?"

"All that is needed." He unlocked a deed-box and took out a packet of documents. "Here are the Colonel's papers. You may look at them, if you like."

Lyall drew a chair to the table, spread them out and read.

"It touched the Colonel on the raw, poor old chap. Did you notice, Barlow, he says no ill word of her—not a word, not a reproach."

"He was a man, Doctor."

"Yet he saw it might all come out some day, and his name be blown upon. He gave you these to be used if the girl should need them, at any sacrifice to his name?"

"Yes."

"Well, she doesn't want them. Wouldn't use them at any price." He picked up the papers and threw them in the fire.

"Lyall!"

"Barlow, if you touch them, I'll brain you." He stood in front of the flaming papers with the fire-iron in his hand.

Barlow saw them curl up, then burn to a tiny heap of grey ash. He sat down helplessly.

"Doctor, would you have used the iron if I had tried to rescue them?"

"I would," said Lyall grimly.

"I didn't say I couldn't rescue them; but I'm glad all the same to think you would have used it had I tried."

Lyall laughed, and going to him put his hand on his shoulder as if he had been his brother.

"Sometimes I think I know you, old chap, sometimes I think I don't. Is there any other scrap of proof left in the world?"

"Not a scrap, Lyall, that I know of."

"Then you may advertise to your heart's content, may tell Mrs. Merton that, failing the missing daughter whose discovery is very improbable, she will be one of the richest women in Australia. News of that kind is a better stimulant than champagne or sparkling hock. By the way, how does Merton take her sort of life? I suppose he can stand the racket?"

"Stand it! Oh yes. Since the Crœsus boom he has had wonderful fortune. He seems to touch nothing that does not turn to gold."

"Let him beware, Barlow! Are you ever conscious

of that premonition of disaster that haunts one's lucky moments? As long as I have lived I seem to have been conscious, innately as it were, of the swing of the pendulum —an unwritten law of compensations. I remember a queer case of mental trouble that came my way years ago. It was that of a rich man—very rich—who drifted into melancholia, pursued by the fixed idea, for which so far as I could ascertain there was no sound reason, that he would die a pauper. Riches seem to have the effect of magnifying the fear of poverty. He was a man of simple habits, too—a chop, a steak, all you could get for a little labour, and he was a physically sound man; yet this fear held him bound in chains."

"How did it end?"

"One morning he cut his throat."

"Hum! Do you know, Doctor, I don't altogether like the way Merton has been acting of late; you've made me feel uneasy. Noticed anything about him?"

"No; nothing out of the common. I ran down to the seaside a week ago and saw him there. I certainly did think him a bit morose. Perhaps it is the boy. He seems to be wrapped up in that youngster. They were down at the beach. I was quite close—close enough to watch his face, though he did not know it. The place rioted in children, little brown-legged, bare-headed mortals splashing in the sea, building marvellous houses out of sand. Well, there he sat, with his puny, pale-faced child, a sort of blot on the scene. Poor devil! You ought to have seen the hunger in his eyes. Desire and shame—shame that his youngster was not as other men's, lusty, strong, full of the *vivida vis*."

"Hum! That's part of the price we pay for luxury, Lyall, the neurotic, self-indulged woman, the feeble child. Well?"

"Oh, there is nothing more. It was just a passing impression."

"The child holds its life on a sort of tenancy at will, doesn't he? You said something of the kind once—some valvular trouble of the heart, wasn't it?"

"Well, that's near enough for a layman. May die in his arms some day—more likely than in hers. Only one, too. It's rather rough, isn't it?"

"That sort of new woman," commented Barlow, "is going to be a distinct curse to this Old World. But I must be off."

When Barlow's cab left him at the door, the many-windowed house, from basement to attic, was a blaze of light. He made his way through the crowd of brilliantly robed women and sombrely clad men to his hostess, who glittered with as many jewels as an Eastern princess. Her face, always hard in its lines, had grown still harder; the thin lips had lost any curve they had ever possessed; the skin, when with critical eye you discovered a native patch, was sallow and coarse-grained. Her figure, the women said, was perfect; their standard differing somewhat from their Maker's. In all her movements there was the artifice of grace, but without the art which conceals art. She had power, and she knew it—the power of the long purse.

Barlow did not remain long in the crowded ballroom, with its sickly atmosphere and glare of light and colour. He found a quiet corner in the card-room, and had for partner at the whist-table a lady who revoked with the innocence of long practice.

Later in the evening he found an opportunity to tell Carrie of the probable fortune that was in store for her. As Lyall had remarked, no stimulating vintage pressed from the grape could intoxicate like the news he had to tell. To Barlow her eyes, usually half closed with the suggestion of

the animal that preys, expanded with surprised excitement. Her breath came short and quick, and the jewelled fingers of her long hands gripped into the palms.

"I must tell Geoffrey."

She sought him eagerly, asking here and there if he had been seen. Barlow at her request also searched for him, but without success.

He had, in fact, stolen from the ballroom, where he was but ill at ease, to the quiet of the night nursery in a distant wing of the house. Dismissing the nurse he sat by the bed where the boy lay. He had been ailing more than usually the past few days. The music from the ballroom was faintly distinguishable. The contrast of the scene he had left, with its movement and colour, the sparkle of jewels, the flushed faces of the women, the sensuous fever of it all, and this dimly lit room, to which He of the equal footstep was so relentlessly moving, struck coldly home to him.

He bowed his head in his hands. Only this little life, and he could not keep it! How futile it all seemed. He, the richest man in the city, and he could not purchase a tiny life, a mere atom of humanity. They had been so much to each other. The one touch of pure love that had reached him was the child's kiss on his lips. Yet he had no more grip on that tiny life than the beggar in the street had grip on the great man's riches.

The child moved restlessly and at last awoke. The father bent over him, and the wasted arms went up and held him round the neck.

"Dad!"

"Better, old chap? Soon be up again, won't you?"

"What's the music for?"

"Mother's got a party, Geoff."

"Oh! Will she come to see me with the shiny things in her hair?"

"Yes, I suppose so; when she has time."

"I like the music, dad, don't you? When I grow up I shall go to lots of parties, shan't I?"

"I suppose so."

"B'cos we're so rich. I'm glad we're rich, aren't you?"

"Suppose so, Sonnie. It has its points."

"Take me in your arms, dad, and we'll pretend we're at the party—just you and me."

He took the child in his arms and nursed him, humming the tune of the waltz that reached them from the ballroom.

Soon the boy's humour changed, and he asked to be taken out on the balcony. It was a moonlight night, the air touched with the breath of departing winter. Geoffrey wrapped a coverlet about the boy, and they went out into the air. There they sat, looking up at the moon near its full.

"The beach is better than parties, isn't it? It won't be so cold next time we go and perhaps I may bathe."

"We'll have a great time next holiday, Sonnie."

"You don't want to be rich to have the beach, do you?"

"Not much."

"Every one can have the beach, can't they?'

"Pretty well."

"Who owns it, dad?"

"God!"

"He's richer than any one, isn't he?"

"Yes, I suppose so." This conception of the Deity as a man of means was new to him.

"He owns the sun, the moon, the stars, ev'ry—thing?"

"Yes, everything."

"Is it b'cos he's so rich I say my prayers, dad?"

Geoffrey the elder sighed drearily. Even the little soul

in his arms was bitten into by it—this worship of riches. It hurt him. He wanted the child to be a child. Had Carrie borne him only a little worldling, a gilded bambino?

He cast about his mind for some thoughts with which to satisfy, to educate this little soul looking out so dimly at the Infinite. He had never had much time for thought of that kind. Perhaps he might recite a few bald platitudes, but what purpose could they serve?

"He is our Father, Geoff; the Father of us all."

"Just as you are—only to me—my father?"

"Yes. Just as I am to you, my son, He is to all."

The boy nestled his face close to him and gave a long, restful sigh, as if settling to sleep. Geoffrey held him close, and lay back in his chair looking into the star-filled spaces of the cloudless sky, heedless of the rise and fall of the music, the murmur of voices, the movement of a crowd —letting his mind graze in unaccustomed pastures. The child's problems of the Unknown came back to him. The same problems in their root as those which in maturer years are wrapped in high-sounding phrases. And he asked, as the child asks, why, "if God could, God did not?" Under this peaceful, star-sown sky men suffered in tribulation of body and mind; many toiled almost unceasingly that some might have leisure and riches; many died that some might live. Yet God could give them all a share of the world's happiness. But he did not. Why?

After all, was there such a thing as happiness? Was it anything more, could it be anything more than an aspiration or a dream?

He lost sight of time in his reverie, forgot his social duty, forgot for a moment even the child in his arms.

It was a rotten business, this everlasting scramble after money! Well, he and the boy would put an end to it some day. They would go right into the heart of things.

God planted a glorious garden every springtime in this land of theirs, this land he loved. He and the boy would go out there, and leave all this garish life behind them. They would find out God there—there in His garden: in the gullies and by the creeks, on the hills and the ranges.

The rattle of carriages and cabs roused him from his dream. The ball was at an end.

He looked down at the face on his arm; the lips were parted with a smile. The child was very still. He held him up to the moonlight and peered closely into his face.

"Wake up, Sonnie! Wake up! Mother will soon be here. The party is over."

He lay a dead weight in his arms. The smiling face with its sunken dark-rimmed eyes never moved — never would move.

"Sonnie! Sonnie!"

The sweat broke out on Geoffrey's face.

"Oh God!" he quavered as he held the body close to him and nestled the smiling face into his neck. "Oh God! he's dead!"

The *portière* that hung across the door opening to the balcony was flung back by hasty hands, and the gaslight caught the facets of the glittering things on the mother's hair.

"Geoffrey, I have such news! Geoffrey, do you hear me—such news! I will be the richest woman—why, the richest woman in Australia." She stopped abruptly. "What is the matter with you? Are you—are you drunk? You beast!"

He stood there with his back turned to her, swaying from side to side, his face against the child's. She heard him moaning in inarticulate grief.

"What is it, Geoffrey? I am sorry—I did not know. You are ill! Listen! Such news! such news!—What is it?" as he gave no answer. "Is the boy worse?"

"Nothing, Carrie—nothing. What does it matter? Buy him back, you're rich enough—buy him back. Ask God what's his price!" And he laughed bitterly.

"Geoffrey!"

"It's nothing, I say. He's dead, that's all! Richer than you, Carrie—richer than us all. Richer—— My little chap! my little son!"

The last cab rattled away.

"Rattlin' fine woman, isn't she?" remarked Robinson Minor, flown with wine and puffing one of the Magnate's cigars.

"Rippin'! Lucky dog, Merton!—everything he wants. Rich as that chap—what's his name?"

"Dives."

"Rich as Dives, beautiful wife, tip-top home."

"By Jove, yes! Luck's not the word for it!"

CHAPTER XII

IT was fine living in those days with excellent pickings. A mere handful of people dusted over the face of a great continent, with patches of denser humanity here and there, like summer flies round lumps of sugar, to mark the cities.

When the auriferous quartz in Golden City dived deeper and deeper and the cost of working it left the margin of profit less, news of great doings in the cities on the seaboard spread inland. It was one of those periodical attacks of inflated values, born of the restless optimistic spirit of young communities. Things boomed. Who set them booming, why they should boom, none troubled to ascertain. That land in the suburbs of cities of yesterday should change hands at prices equal to, nay, greater than the prices asked for land in the vicinity of the great capitals of the Old World, did not apparently strike any one as strange or disproportioned. A feverish haste to profit by to-day, with a reckless disregard of to-morrow—these are the dominating characteristics of "a boom." Deposit banks, mortgage and real estate banks, investment corporations, syndicates to lift you into affluence on £10 shares paid up to five shillings, sprang into existence at the first breath of the boom. The epidemic of a short road to riches—for it had the characteristics of an epidemic—left no class untouched; the thrifty tradesman, the hard-working digger with his "bit" in the savings bank, even "the missus" with her few pounds in a building

society, became its willing victims. When you could take up "gilt-edged" stock to the face value of a thousand pounds for a few inconsiderable "fivers," how could one resist? Great fortunes were made every day on paper. Fathers made long wills with innumerable bequests, on paper; children married gaily and built fine homes, on paper. Truly for a time Golden City did not live on bread alone, for its daily diet was three-fourths paper.

The Golden Orient lode on which the Crœsus Consols had been sunk, was pinching out, and Geoffrey Merton had glimpses of a not far distant future when his means would show an uncomfortable shrinkage. Neither he nor his wife —certainly not his wife—could view decadence in their fortune with equanimity. Something would have to be done if the Magnate were to remain the Magnate. A dying spasm of the Crœsus Consols, which for a time increased its yield by some unknown stimulus, gave Merton an opportunity of placing a few of his many shares. To have put the whole body on the market would have precipitated the collapse. However, he realized money sufficient to give him a good start in the new form of venture that was rapidly replacing the speculation of the Mining Exchange. He became a director on the boards of several of the most progressive of the banks and syndicates. The luck that had hitherto been so closely associated with his fortunes showed no sign of abatement. His name on the prospectus of a company was in itself an allurement to the public—that cow which, unlike other kine, yields abundant milk on the promise of distant pastures.

He rapidly became a progressionist of the most advanced type. Barlow slept lightly in these days and frequently woke from evil dreams; but the masterful hand of the junior partner held him tightly. He meant well, Barlow always meant well, and could see straight in a clear atmosphere;

but who could see at all in the murk and dust of those days? They were all in it; solid old banks with once solid assets were drawn into it; departing from the straight road of one time banking, they advanced recklessly on real estate, mining properties, squatting properties and the rest. What would happen when the cry for gold came to them across their counters? It seemed to Barlow that the safest place for his little fortune was a hole in the ground; but, alas! he could not put his hands on it to place it there.

When he thought of it, what some time it must mean, he sweated like an ox straining at the yoke. He dreaded night-time and his pillow, when the fear of to-morrow clutched at his heart. Try as he might—and the nerve of youth was no longer his—he could not rid himself of the shackles with which Merton bound him. The junior partner in those days seemed more than human.

It was useless to seek a method in his madness; there was none. No wild venture was too wild for him. By sheer force of the faith that was in him, expressed in extravagant terms, with no hope too optimistic, no pledge too great, he forced himself upward to the crazy pinnacle of the boom.

After the death of the child he cut himself adrift from domestic life. The lake house saw little of him. He grew more morose and yet increasingly restless. When he visited his home he wandered aimlessly in and out without interest in horse or dog or grounds. He drank now—not in the old "nip, nip" way of the "shouting" custom, but in a steady soak from after dinner till midnight. Under the thin veil of business he had taken rooms in the city, and when play at the club failed to allure him he locked himself in his den and drank. Outside the excitement of speculation he was practically without resource. Of the poor man's solace, little occupations, inconsequential interests, the hobby that

takes one for a span into a world of new interest, he knew nothing. It had been one long scramble after money; all the years behind him were "dollar marked," and the lust of money had so bitten into him that away from the excitement of the bourse life was flat, stale, unprofitable. He had never lacked an assurance, divine or otherwise, in his own ability; but now assurance became doubly sure. His co-directors ceased to argue with him; he beat them down by sheer self-assertion till they grew to hate him with a great hate—but he had his way; he never failed to have his way, and his luck clung to him with a persistency that defied all rational argument.

Though he had severed his life from Carrie's, he still treated her with the reckless generosity of the man who flings his money broadcast; and she, callous to all affections that did not centre round the ego, let him go his gait with indifference. She had faith in him in one respect alone. He was a giant of finance—the stock descriptive phrase for his kind; and she followed his luck with every penny of her father's wealth. The two years' condition of the Hatter's will had yet some time to run, or that fortune too would have followed the lead of the Colossus of Golden City. And the mightier the Colossus became, the more flabby of body and soul became William, the senior partner.

He frequently consulted the Doctor. At first Lyall laughed at him. The unworldly David was not untouched by the prevailing fever. He hinted occasionally at the financial backbone, with the suggestion that it was in process of making; but Barlow was absent-minded in these days, and paid little heed to him.

However, one day, when the hint was unmistakable, Barlow looked up at him with a scared face.

"You don't mean, Lyall——"

"What old man?"

"You haven't been dabbling in this wild cat business, have you?"

"'Wild cat' rubbish, Barlow! You're all nerves these days. Getting a regular old woman. This is what comes of drifting into old bachelorhood. You mope and grizzle and get nervy at your own shadow. Why shouldn't I have my bit in it, Barlow? Seems to me that for a man who knows all about it, you're pretty well up to the neck yourself."

"That's what's killing me, Lyall. I'm caught like a woodcock—snared in a gin, Lyall. Sometime when you are over the hill with your face turned west where the sun sets, you'll get the grace of a wide charity for this sinful Old World. Man, I never knew it was so easy to get drawn into a business like this—rotten right through. The preacher in his pulpit talks about life as though it were a succession of cross-roads—'right hand to Heaven,' 'left hand to hell'—and there you have it to face squarely. But that isn't life. You blunder along, and before you know it you have passed the signpost in the dark and are wandering down the road to hell. That's life."

CHAPTER XIII

"DO you ever see Merton nowadays?" asked Lyall of his "sweetheart." It was David's name for her. He said it was good English, and had fitted generation after generation of good women. He winced at "*fiancée*."

"No, David. We have never seen him since the night he came here after the boy's death."

"Ah," said Lyall, "it is so, Cherry, isn't it? When life hits us hard then we come home. When all is well, we forget. The only true community is one of sorrow. Give us prosperity, and Lord love you! we are up so high on our horse that we see no one; but when the beast chucks us, well—we sneak home to salve our bruises. Home's not so bad when you're tripped and down."

"Poor Geoffrey! He sat on the hearthrug there, hour after hour, with Auntie Tod smoothing his hair, just like years ago when we were children."

"There is a sympathy of physical touch—the touch of the loving hand, sweetheart."

"He has changed greatly, David. It seems difficult to realize so great a change when one looks back. Of late I have become almost—almost afraid of him."

"How?"

"It is hard to describe. Perhaps it is born of that intuition they say we women have. It is almost too dreadful to say, but when I meet him I feel afraid."

That was the beginning of the Doctor's closer observation of Geoffrey.

One evening in a spare hour he drew a book from its place on the shelf in his study and read diligently an interesting chapter headed "Dementia Paralytica," and when he had finished smoked a pipe thoughtfully. The smoke as it curled and spiralled seemed to him in a fantastic way to write impalpably certain mystic letters. He shuddered, rose and put the book back with the muttered words, "from G.P.I. Good Lord deliver us!"

Meantime Golden City flourished as it had never flourished even in the palmiest days of the gold rush. You could not walk a hundred yards in its principal street without knocking against a paper millionaire in real estate. If ever the city was troubled with evil dreams it was restored to hope in the morning by the voice of Colossus roaring in the newspapers and the Stock Exchange. The confiding multitude swallowed his gilded prophesies with the assurance that much advertisement conveys to the purchasers of pills and potions. Back in swamps and gullies, remote from habitation, his land syndicates promoted cities—lithographed on paper. You had only to shut your eyes and listen to the entrancing song of that sweet singer, whose name is "Prospectus," to see rising before you city halls, cathedral, theatres, parks with free music, and art galleries, every delight you could think of to be enjoyed by taking up a magnificently situated allotment of land, facing on a main thoroughfare five minutes from the post-office (see sketch plan), and within easy walking distance of the railway. (See proposal for Public Works, to be introduced next session—some session, it did not matter.)

Years afterwards worthy citizens might be met upon occasion, rambling in the bush looking for allotments they had never seen—splendid sites they had dreamt of and

duly paid for. It was a mad time, a merry time, to be enjoyed to the full to-day, to be paid for to-morrow and the day after.

The city gave a banquet to its great financier, Geoffrey Merton. It was held in the City Hall, and the Mayoral plate of the best "electro" glittered on tables that were decorated by the city's one real gift of beauty, its glory of flowers. It was as wonderful a city for flowers as it was for hopes and fortunes; the pity of it was they died as speedily the one as the other. Lyall was there and Barlow also, the gaunt shadow of his former self.

The Mayor, in eulogistic words, proposed the toast of "Our Guest." His Worship's speech was in danger of falling to pieces; there were so few substantives to hold the strings of laudatory adjectives together.

Then Merton replied.

It was the best opportunity the Doctor had had for many a day of observing the great man closely.

Geoffrey had become almost grossly stout in figure; his face was flushed and the eyes conveyed a curious impression of inequality, as though one were larger than the other. The facial muscles had an unpleasant way of twitching; when he spoke, the "fibrillar tremblings," as the Doctor afterwards learnedly described them to Barlow, gave the mouth a curiously weak expression, as of hesitancy and the lack of control, in odd contrast to the self-satisfied, dogmatic speech of the man.

When it was over Lyall walked with Barlow to the latter's chambers, where over whisky, in whose quality Barlow took pardonable pride, the Doctor became communicative.

"To you, Barlow, I can talk as, of course, I dare not talk to any one else. I have noticed something odd, out of the common odd, about Merton lately."

Barlow knocked the ashes from his pipe against the grate and said laconically, "Well!"

"Did you notice to-night how he spoke?"

"Slipshod! He gets more slipshod every day, Lyall. Yes, I've noticed something in him; I don't know what it is. The fact is, Lyall, I'm afraid to think anything about it."

"I'd like," said David, rubbing his chin as he lounged back in the easy-chair, gazing meditatively at the ceiling and sending up a cloud of smoke—"I'd like to hear him say, 'Round the rugged rock the ragged rascal ran.'"

Barlow looked at him suspiciously, as though all the out of common oddness was not confined to Geoffrey.

"What do you mean, man?"

"Oh, nothing in particular. Just one of those fancies that come and go, you know. These chaps sometimes shy off the 'ragged rascal,' and have no fancy at all for the 'rugged rock.'"

"You have a meaning underlying this, Lyall. What is it? I thought you meant to tell me."

"So I did, Barlow; so I did. But then I remembered the advice of an old professor, 'Never diagnose G.P.I. till you know it is a certainty.'"

"What does that mean?"

"It means, Barlow, that I'm not quite sure. You see, G.P.I. is progressive, whereas with Merton it is, or seems to be, recurrent. He has lapses from complete into incomplete sanity—perhaps that is the best way of putting it,—and it puzzles me; but then I do not profess to be an alienist in any special sense."

"Speak plainly, Lyall. What are you driving at?"

"Perhaps after all you'd better know. But remember, I'm not sure—not deadly sure."

"Very well."

"There is what medical men call a condition of mentalization that springs out of, or is often directly traceable to, the sort of life Merton has been leading. You know the God-forsaken, God-forgetting life that scores of these men lead: the excitement of wealth-getting, the excitement of self-gratification on the physical side, drink, and all the rest of it. They call this disease G.P.I. for short—that is, General Paralysis of the Insane. It is a cerebral disease that works its way out in a sort of ghastly travesty of life."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, one's awfully happy for a while, Barlow—just for a while. And then——. You see, a G.P.I. man starts on his primrose path by seeing the world stretching—as it stretched a long time ago,—below the hill at his feet,—wealth unbounded, the riches of the world lie before him. He walks erect as a God—the poor midget! His powers are unbounded: if once he were scant of speech, now he has language, of a sort, at command. By-and-by his tongue begins to trip; he tails his sentences into incoherency, his words are slurred. The brain he has abused is giving him the slip."

"Round the rugged rock?"

"That's it. You will see his facial muscles tremble, the muscles of the hesitant mouth fibrillate. There are odd lapses of memory, twitches from sudden spasms in the head, and so on."

"And then?"

"I won't take you all the way down that road, Barlow. It is not good for eyes to look at in the end."

"How long does it take to travel—down there?"

"Oh, there is no fixed time; but it averages from two to three years."

"A long time for such a journey, Lyall—a long, long time."

"Remember, it is a glorious journey for part of the way."

"It is the other part one thinks of." And Barlow shuddered as he thought of it.

"I wonder," said Lyall after a pause—"I wonder if it will be the old thing. 'All gone! Not one friend left to take his fortune by the arm and go along with him.' Will she take his arm down that awful road, Barlow? Is there the underlying grace in her for such a task as that, I wonder?"

"She? Carrie?" And Barlow laughed bitterly.

CHAPTER XIV

BARLOW liked his coffee hot; and the elderly widow who managed the affairs of his bachelor establishment served up bacon cooked to such perfection as to tempt the most sybarite appetite. But neither coffee nor bacon, hot from pot and pan, had any attraction for Barlow this morning. Nor had it attracted him for many a morning before.

The daily paper was propped against the coffee-pot. His eyes were glued on a column headed in thick black capitals and with many sub-heads, "The Great Financial Crisis." The column he was reading was not in itself sensational; it told neither of murder nor sudden death, of war nor pageant. It was merely the dry record of a parliamentary proceeding.

"Last night the Treasurer moved that so much of the standing sessional orders be suspended in order to permit the passing through all its stages in one day of a bill to make bank notes a first charge on bank assets; and to temporarily enable the Governor to authorize in certain cases an increased issue and circulation of the notes of any bank, and to declare bank notes to be a legal tender."

That was all! And face to face with it Barlow let the coffee become cold and the crispness pass out of the bacon.

It all began about a month ago, though it had been in the making quite a long way back; for it was like an

African river whose source was unexplored, a little stream far back, but here, now, it laid the whole land under flood, submerging everything.

It had lapped first against the minor institutions on their little hills of sand, and lo! they fell in the twinkling of an eye; and still it rose, creeping up inch by inch against the more solid earth-works on which the old-established banks had built their sand-stone palaces, till they too were being slowly undermined.

As if in the worry of fate, the parks and gardens of Golden City were ablaze with the colours of autumn chrysanthemums. The days were days to live in, rejoicing in the physical act; but there was no rejoicing, there was no appreciation of that kind of wealth in Golden City this autumn. The dropping of dead leaves from the oaks transplanted from the home land was in closer sympathetic touch with these days of universal mourning.

In less than two years some forty so-called financial institutions had come to grief, leaving a long train of broken fortunes in their wake; after that first one then another of the great banks of issue and deposit, some of the later-born deserted by their elder brethren, shut their doors. The rest opened them each day fearful that the morrow would find them also closed. Round these same doors of a morning before the clock struck ten you could see a dense crowd of silent, pale-faced men and women waiting to demand payment in gold. Greasy notes that had passed current year after year were coming up to be paid in gold. You could not tempt the holders to exchange them for new, clean, crisp notes. It was gold, all gold, nothing but gold.

All the available gold in the colony was being drained into the pockets of the people, to the great profit of many folk who lived by the purveyance of strong drinks; but to

the great apprehension of many more provident, though exercised as to its safe keeping. Unlike the banks of older countries, the banking corporations and companies of the new open an account with anyone who liked to deposit a five-pound note with them. The number of petty accounts far outnumber those of greater sums.

The run that started with the weakest extended daily to one after another till not a bank remained whose counters were not besieged by crowds demanding gold.

In the Legislative Assembly of the Colony that night, when the Treasurer stood up in his place to move the suspension of the Standing Orders for so momentous a purpose, he did so as it were in the chamber of death, the death of great fortunes, the death of the little settlement that the hand of husband and father had made to shield wife and children from blank want. Bank shares in the Colonies are not held by the rich few—men of fortune banding together to make a profitable investment—but are held by the middle class, the provident, the relatively poorer class of the community—tempted, as they who have but little means and a great need are always tempted, by a high rate of interest. The private bank is unknown. It had never been needful to call up the whole of the capital in these joint-stock concerns; and no one,—not one in all these thousands,—had ever dreamed it would be called up. To call up even a portion would bring many to their knees; to call up all would spread ruin broadcast. The rush for gold was checked by legislation; then, with breathing space, such of the banking institutions as survived devised schemes of reconstruction.

Was it any wonder Barlow let the coffee get cold and the bacon flabby as he sat there face to face with ruin, spelt "reconstruction"?

The luck that had befriended him through all his

financial ventures still clung to Merton. The National Investment Bank of issue and deposit, chief among the paper institutions with which his name was associated, kept its doors open; but they were daily besieged by an ever-increasing crowd of depositors, eager to withdraw their money from its keeping. One morning the clock struck ten, a quarter past, half past, and still the doors remained closed. A notice was posted up in one of the large windows looking on the street, and a deep murmur spread outward through the crowd. It intensified into a roar of execration, and a stone smashed through the big pane of plate glass. The police cleared the roadway.

A meeting of directors was called, and following it came the announcement that a general meeting of shareholders, at which Geoffrey Merton, chairman of the board, would preside, would be held at an early date. Finally the date was fixed and the City Hall engaged to accommodate the investors. Merton insisted on this step, under the circumstances daring to the point of recklessness. He had kept this bogus institution on its feet up till then by the sheer force of his personal optimism in speech and print. To this point he had exercised the influence of a fanatic over a crowd; that occult emotional influence that sets reason and prudence at defiance. His belief in his own capacity was supreme; he reached beyond the debatable ground of genius till he touched the point of madness. The closed doors and the splintered glass marked the ultimate point from which the pendulum swung back. From that point began the emotional reaction. The faithful, as the faithful have done in all ages, were making ready to stone the prophet who had promised the impossible and had failed in its attainment.

The day of the meeting arrived. Barlow was at the main entrance before the appointed hour, but it was so

beset by a hustling crowd of shareholders that he trespassed on the courtesy of the mayor to use his private entrance. Thence he reached the platform. The hall was already filled and still the people poured in. It was impossible to limit the attendance to those financially interested. It had been noised about that the bull was to be done to death, the mighty one put down from his seat. The crowd so eager to burn incense to its idol yesterday was no less eager to play the iconoclast to-day. The city thrust its population into the hall pell-mell.

Merton had not yet arrived. Looking down on the excited crowd who filled the chairs and overflowed into the gangways, Barlow saw many familiar faces; but they were perhaps too intent on the business before them to give him any sign of recognition—all save the round-faced, bespectacled Lyall, who had got well forward in the press.

As the appointed hour drew near, Barlow became, as did many in the audience, impatient for the appearance of the chairman. A rumour circulated through the hall, starting no one knew where, that "Merton wasn't game to face it." Then cries came for "Merton! Merton!" and an ominous hiss followed. It was yet five minutes to the hour and Barlow rose and begged for patience, pledging his honour that the chairman would be there to time.

"His honour! My——" sneered a voice from the back benches, and there came a bitter laugh from a group gathered there; but the bulk of the shareholders and depositors, quiet folk who had no thought for anything but the business of the day, cried "Chair! Chair!"

As the big bell of the city clock struck the hour there was a movement on the platform. Merton stepped to the front and took his seat before the table at which his co-directors were already seated. His coat bore marks of recent mud-stains, and there was a black patch on his

forehead near the hair line—a piece of court plaster put on hastily to bind a cut. He had been assaulted on the way to the meeting.

Barlow, sitting at his side, noted the quick, nervous gestures, the increasing restlessness of the hands, touching this, that, anything—his hair, the table, the ink pot, the pens, the paper—but never at rest. His lips moved tremulously and spasmodic twitches seemed to draw the eyelids upward.

The secretary read some minutes to which no one listened; the crowd talked, and moved in the ferment of excitement that leads up to a critical moment.

At last Merton rose to explain the situation and place the directors' proposals before the shareholders.

As he did so Lyall, who had been watching him intently, left his seat and wedged himself in the gangway.

Merton swayed backwards and forwards against the edge of the table, and they waited for him to speak—impatiently, with cries and abuse.

"Let us have it, Merton!" And there was a chorus of assent—"Out with it!"

"Gentlemen!" Then there was a pause, and still he swayed backwards and forwards. "Gentlemen, this is the proudest moment of my life!"

For a moment there was a pause of puzzled astonishment, and then the hall rang with ironical laughter.

"You look it, you —— swindler," came a voice full in his face.

"It's proudest moment," reiterated the clogged voice, and then it stopped.

"Confound it, man, let me pass! I'm a doctor! Don't you see the man's ill?" ripped out Lyall, as he dug his elbows into the crowd, forcing his way to the platform.

As he reached it Merton fell with a lurch into the chair.

Barlow put him back in it, whilst one ran for brandy, another for water, and a voice cried, "Is there a doctor here?"—just as Lyall clambered on the platform.

"All right. Keep away there, keep away; don't crowd on the man. Undo his collar. Here, man, cut it, cut it!" and the bull throat of Colossus was bared.

Barlow was for adjourning the meeting, and the other directors assented; but when the vice-chairman put it to the meeting there was such a roar of dissent he got no further.

"What are you going to do?"

"Have patience, gentlemen, have patience."

"Patience! To hell with your patience! I want my money."

A woman in the crowd, thin, hatchet-faced—the hatchet face that is ground sharp on the hard grindstone of life—shrieked something in a shrill voice, then volleyed incoherent words.

"That's right, missus! Let the —— have it. Where's my fifty quid, you dog, you ——" And he poured a stream of vituperation from his lips.

A cry rose, "He's dead!"

"Dead, is he; and a good thing too! Dead—is he? What did he care if we died of rot and starvation, so long as he and that Jezebel of his had our coin? Dead! and damned too!"

But the chorus of "Let us have it!" "Spit it out!" "Give it mouth!" soon silenced individual voices.

"Tell them, Barlow," said the vice-chairman. "They won't listen to me."

Barlow rose. There was a half-hearted cheer, and one man in front cried—

"You used to be a clean man, Billy. What is it? Chuck it out!"

"Gentlemen!"

"Curse your 'gentlemen,' what is it?"

"Get him away quickly, Lyall," he said in a scared whisper, and Barlow went to the front of the platform and tried once more.

"Fellow shareholders!"

"We don't want any palaver, Barlow; we're not here for talk. We want business."

"Well, this is how the matter stands. You all know the terrible financial strain we have been——" He heard a movement behind; they were getting Merton away. "As I said, you all know——"

A howl greeted him, and a burly fellow sprang on the platform, crying—

"Out with it, or I'll smash you!"

"Dawson, I'm not afraid of you, or a dozen of you. I stand here like the rest of you—a ruined man to the last penny. May God forgive me for touching this business!"

"Well, what is it?" said Dawson, a trifle less aggressively. "We haven't much to guess, Billy, my man; you'll have to say it, or I'll make you swallow your teeth."

And Barlow said it. "Reconstruction!"

"Reconstruction! Reconstruction!" and a wild, bitter, uproarious laugh filled the room.

"Reconstruct hell, Barlow! It's wanted for dogs like Merton and you," said a pale tense-faced man.

"Hell? Nicholson! It doesn't want reconstruction; I've been in that syndicate for two years that seem like eternity. Hell! I'm not afraid of hell! It can't hurt me."

But a slashing backhander from one of the crowd who had scrambled up with the rush of others to the platform sent Billy staggering. He put up his hands—mechanically, but he was too old and there was no heart in him; a clean facer settled it.

By this time the police were in, and soon the hall was cleared. Barlow had staggered back to the wall; and when the crowd had gone he crept home, down by streets and alleys, crying like a child,—not for any pain of body, but for the pain of soul that was in him for all the dirt and dishonour, all the filth of it that he could never wash away.

And Merton sat on his chair smiling at Lyall, twitching his face and slurring long sentences of bombast.

BOOK III

THE HARVEST

CHAPTER I

"YOU will stay the night," she asked anxiously.

"Yes! Can you send someone to the township? Very well, tell him to knock up the chemist."

"Doctor!"

The man she addressed was almost shabbily clad, his linen frayed and soiled. He bore the appearance of one whom hope had left by the wayside. There was an unhealthy colour in his cheeks, an air of lassitude and a lack of interest in his movements.

"Is it very bad? Will he—die?"

"He is an old man and a shock such as he has had would test the powers of one far younger. Still he is constitutionally a strong man; organically there is nothing wrong with him. How did it happen?"

"He had been breaking in the colt. Ishmael was very proud of him. You see he had a bit of blood and Ishmael let him run in the paddock, never rounded him up, for it isn't as though we had to now. There are other horses. Ishmael used to say that he liked to see the young thing

run wild a bit; that by-and-by he'd break him in. I think he didn't like the thought of it. He's queer a little about some things. He's very soft about animals, is Ishmael."

"Well, what happened?"

"Will, that's my brother, persuaded him; and at last he said 'All right!' but he wouldn't let Will touch him. Would do it himself; said the colt knew him, and he wasn't going to have him half killed in trying to break him in. This morning they rounded up the colt in a corner of the paddock. Will said it took them an awful time to do it. Ishmael had the halter and tried to slip it on his head; but the colt reared right up and broke away. Will says he seemed to come straight down on Ishmael. He bled a lot when they were bringing him in, and he's been unconscious ever since. Then Will rode over for a doctor."

"And as I was the only one available you took me?"

"We've heard you're real clever when—" and she hesitated.

"When I'm sober." He completed the sentence with bitter frankness.

"We're all short of grace somewhere," replied the woman simply. "Why don't you give it up?"

"Can't. It's a disease."

"No it isn't."

"And pray how do you know?"

"Ishmael says it isn't a disease and he knows—because he was going that way once himself."

"Oh, indeed! And what does Ishmael say it is?"

"He says it's because a man doesn't try earnest—like—like you break a colt."

The Doctor laughed. "The illustration's not too apt. You see the colt breaks away."

"A man's self isn't like a colt that can break away. It's all in him and he can master it if he wants to."

The Doctor looked at her with a smile,—half superciliously, half in humour.

"Suppose the colt is stronger than the man?"

"Then you can ask God and He will help—surely."

There was no reply left to Dr. Rockleigh in the face of a faith so simple, so elementary as this. He abruptly turned the conversation.

"What is Ishmael's other name?"

"Unit!"

"Ishmael Unit! What an odd name! Do you know I feel an interest in all Ishmaels? Once I had a special interest in one. He went into the wilderness."

"Scripture?"

"No; this was child of an older growth—a man I knew. I've often wondered what happened to him in the wilderness?" He had seated himself at the table and pencilled a prescription on a page of his note-book. "Give this to the messenger, and in the meantime I'll take another look at our patient; and then if you can spare me the time, and it is not an intrusion into your private life or his, I would like to know something about this Ishmael of yours. In return I may perhaps tell you something about mine—that is if—well, if what I suspect is true."

The winter had not yet wholly departed; and whilst Will, now grown to manhood, saddled a horse and took the prescription into the township, the Doctor, returning from the sick room, put a fresh box log on the open hearth, and settling down with his pipe repeated the request to hear the story of his patient's life.

Ciss, now a middle-aged woman, had changed greatly since the day when she and Ishmael held festival by the river-side after the first crop of corn had been sent south. Increasing prosperity had not relaxed the Puritan conscience—that steadfast rock of her people—but it had

extended her outlook on life. It was conscience, and the realization of a broader social life, that set her to work with such strenuous zeal on her own education. Prosperity intensified and expanded all that was best in her. She was quick to perceive that the adjuncts of prosperity, the comforts and refinements o home life, had in themselves a subtle influence on character. No doubt she made mistakes—woeful mistakes—on the æsthetic side; culture was spelt in somewhat flamboyant letters in the new home Ishmael had built for them. She pruned her speech of its grosser crudities, read literature on perhaps somewhat old-fashioned lines, but good wholesome fare, and kept herself physically and spiritually healthy. Her influence told on the others. Betty grew into a good woman, and with advantages of education the elder did not possess, never let the fact declare itself to the latter's humiliation. Will had become, under the control of Ishmael, every inch a man—truthful, courageous, "white," masterful of himself and others. When Ishmael looked at his six feet of up-standing manhood, the broad shoulders, the tanned face, with clear resolute eyes, he felt there need be no hesitation in handing the reins to this young master when his own hour of departure came.

Seated on the opposite side of the open fireplace with its smouldering logs, Ciss retraced the days of their life since Ishmael, weary in body and soul, cast down his swag at their door.

Rockleigh questioned her closely from time to time, interested, it seemed to her, particularly in the spiritual development of the man. He piqued her curiosity, and she bluntly asked him if the surmise were true. He bade her wait till he in turn had told of his Ishmael and the reason would be clear. When at length the tale of Ishmael's victory over the scrub, of his fatherhood of the little group

of helpless ones, and the building of their fortunes into a stable structure had been told, she thanked God for such a man as he had been to them.

For a little while the fervour of the woman's closing words, drawn from the faith within her, brought silence between them.

Rockleigh looked into the fire and smoked his pipe.

Ciss broke the interval abruptly. "Now tell me of your Ishmael."

Moved by the frankness of her own narrative and the simple earnest avowal of the debt they owed the man who had come to them,—"sent by God" as she had described it, —he met her with equal frankness. He told her the story of his childhood, youth, and manhood, and of him who had brought ruin to Rockleigh's people. The facts of the experiment at the hospital, when his enemy fell into his hands, he confessed without reserve. He saw the look of aversion, indeed of terror, she cast at him, but he went on with apparent indifference. Finally he related how this Ishmael of his had been sent into the wilderness. Then he spoke briefly of his own broken career, the temptations of the lonely morbid life he led, his wanderings from place to place, failure dogging him down Avernus. When he ended she lifted her eyes to him.

"Is it the same man?"

He nodded assent.

"There can be no doubt about it. He bears the cruel mark still. How could you hate like that?"

"Surely it is not hard to understand. Father, mother, sister. Think of it. They were my blood; my heart's-strings. The only creatures I had to love, and they gave their lives for me. I would do it again. Do it to-day."

"Hush!" She spoke in a whisper as if in fear. "It is all past, all dead. You must forgive him. He has made

a sacrifice, oh, a great sacrifice of his own life. He gave himself for us, and we were nothing to him!"

"You can't expiate; you can't wipe out; you can't undo. You can't set off a good deed against an ill one done. The ill one lives for ever. Do you think you can kill it, as you would a snake? What am I to-day? What did you tell me I was?"

"I didn't say it, but you are"—she said the words deliberately, "you are a drunkard. It isn't cruel to tell you the truth. It is the truth; and you can fight it."

"What made me a drunkard? What made me a poor mad fool? What was the beginning of it all? Just that man! He sowed the seeds of it and he can't undo it any more than he can give my mother back to me, give my sister back."

"Doesn't all he did for us, when we couldn't do anything for ourselves, we who didn't belong to him at all, count against the old wickedness?"

"You can't undo the ill deeds of yesterday by the good deeds of to-day," he reiterated tersely.

"Not even if a man gives his life for others—like Ishmael did?"

"No."

"Then there isn't anything in all Christ did for us."

"Christ was a diagonal across the lines of Nature. I know Nature only, and its laws are as true of acts and words as they are of physical things. Set an ill deed going and you can never stop it. It works its way right into the texture of life. You can't trace it perhaps, but it's there, just as the physical sin is in the third and fourth generation." He forgot for the moment his auditor as she pondered his words with knitted brows.

They heard the clatter of hoofs on the pathway. It was Will returning with the medicine.

Ciss rose and crossed to the doctor, standing before him.

"Doctor Rockleigh! I want you to give me your promise, your sacred promise. You will not harm him? You'll do all you can, everything to bring him through."

"I promise on my honour; or what's left of it."

"Thank you," and she held out her hand to him as if to bind the bargain.

"You have nothing to thank me for. You do not understand, that is all."

"Don't understand what?"

"I'll tell you frankly; at least I'll be honest with you. As likely as not this mental shock may bring back all the past to him. Time after time it happens. It may happen with him. He may in turn forget all the intervening time or he may simply replace the lost links."

"Well?" she queried eagerly.

"Ishmael had a son. Ishmael sowed his soul with tares—rank, damnable weeds. That son is reaping them now. A great harvest."

"Where is the son?"

"You must have heard of him; of course you have; every one has. Geoffrey Merton, the genius of finance, the king of promoters and the rest of it."

"The man whose name is in the papers? The people wanted to tear him to pieces the other night. It was at a meeting."

"That is Ishmael's son. If you love Ishmael, pray that he may die to-night; but I'll do my best to keep him here for you."

Will entered. "Here you are, doctor! There's the stuff. I had almost to batter the door down before I could make the old man hear. It's so dark I couldn't see the track and had to let the mare pick her way. You'll pull

him through, won't you? He's all our father was to us. There's not a thing we have in the world we don't owe to him."

But Ciss turned aside to hide her face and pray that God might be merciful to Ishmael, and if He thought it best, would let him die.

"All right! He'll pull through, never fear. I'll sit up with him. Your sister had better go to bed, but you might stay here; I may want help."

The daylight had not yet come when Ishmael moved in his bed and muttered.

The doctor seated at the bedside, his head drooped on his chest in the half sleep of the watcher, was alert in a moment. He bent over the sick man who looked up at him with the dull groping of perception in his eyes.

"I—I—want Barlow! Where's Barlow?"

CHAPTER II

"IT looks as though it were true, doesn't it?"

Ciss was seated on the floor beside an old battered tin box once painted green, its colour now hardly distinguishable. Ishmael held in his hand the pages of a letter she had passed to him.

"You see," she continued, "uncle must have known all the time. Known he wasn't my uncle truly. I s'pose he kept me just for her sake—his sister's sake—the same as I would for Will or Betty. You see, Ishmael, there were the two of us, and we were both so little he would never know—I mean the Colonel, the man she talks of in her letters, would never know. Men don't know one baby from another like women do; more especially when you don't see them for months."

"That's so," assented Ishmael with a nod. "What set you on the hunt?"

"I kept seeing that advertisement month after month. It was like a story to me; I used to wonder if they'd ever find her. Now on the top of it comes this letter from the gentleman. What's his name, Ishmael? There it is, that letter on the table."

Ishmael took it up and looked at the signature, "David Lyall." Turning it over he noticed the professional intimation of the hours of consultation in the corner.

"He seems to be a doctor."

"Doctor David Lyall?"

"Yes."

"He asked me if I had any papers, letters, or anything of that kind about my childhood. Of course I hadn't. Didn't remember anything about it when I was a dot like that. Then I thought of uncle's old box. Once when he was going through it he showed me a packet of letters and said they were from my mother. I've read them through, so have you. Did you notice anything in them?"

"No," replied Ishmael, "nothing that would help us."

"Men aren't as sharp as women by a long way," she replied. "Well, I did. Don't you notice she always writes 'my little girl' or 'Cherry' when she's talking about her own home, and 'the' little girl when she talks of me? I'm 'the' little girl. That's how I know."

"Not much to build on, Ciss, I'm afraid."

"Oh, it's the little and the little that make the whole building, you know."

"What's that other letter at the bottom there? It's sealed. Shall I break it?"

"Let me!" She took it and opened the foolscap envelope. Inside was a note-sized envelope opened and containing several sheets of paper. Ishmael waited patiently till she had read them. She did so with an absorption that indicated their importance. At last she finished the letter, and with a long breath let her hands fall on her lap.

"Well?"

"It's all there, Ishmael; she must have found out all about it; a woman would, you know—must. It's in our nature. We're born curious. She found it all out, and there it is."

Ishmael in turn read it. "I see it was intended for you if ever your uncle thought it might be of use to you, not otherwise. How is it, if women are as curious as you say, Ciss, and I reckon you're right, you never looked through these things?"

"They are Will's rightly you know, and I kept the box for him—kept it so long that I almost clean forgot it till this letter came yesterday, then I remembered; and that set me wondering if there were anything in it concerning me."

"What do you think of it now, Ciss?"

She raised her face and looked at him with grave earnestness.

"It isn't my fault, Ishmael, whose child I am. It isn't as though I ever had a father and mother like other children have. There were only uncle and Will and Betty and dear old Ned for me. If they give me all this money—— You say there was a lot of money, Ishmael?"

"Yes. I've heard so."

"If they give me this money, God will help me to use it well."

Ishmael bowed his head gravely.

"You are still going to Golden City? You are quite, quite sure it is right, Ishmael?"

"Quite sure."

"I think so too. You saved us, Ishmael, and we were nothing to you, but he is your son."

"My only child, Ciss, and I killed his soul."

She moved to his side and took his hand in hers, "Before you went into the wilderness?"

"Before."

"He told you everything? Dr. Rockleigh, I mean."

He nodded.

"Do you forgive him, Ishmael?"

"There is nothing to forgive—nothing. He gave me a new life, a better one. It was all gain to me."

"Thank you, Ishmael; our father Ishmael. It's odd, isn't it, how sometimes men's curses are just God's blessings?"

"I am going to him to-night. The boat leaves at twelve."

"Like coming back from the dead, isn't it? You are going to save him?"

He shook his head sadly. "That isn't possible; but I am going to him, to try and bring him out of it all, out here into our wilderness."

"Bring him to us, Ishmael; bring him to us. And don't you see how it is possible to do more than that, far more? You'd bring him with all the suffering he has caused in his memory, always. That would be just awful! He shan't come that way, Ishmael. He shall come to us quite clean again, everything wiped out. All this money, all mine, all yours—ours—shall go to do it. You saved us, Ishmael, and now you must take it all, every penny of it, and bring him back with you to start fresh here in the open. Didn't I say,"—and she went to him and put her hand on his shoulder,—"didn't I say God would tell me what to do with it? When you said surely you were going, then God opened my eyes and let me see why He had sent me all that money."

Ishmael raised his head and looked straight into the thin, life-worn face with its glowing eyes, filled with spiritual exaltation, and thought truly it was as she had said—the hand of God was in it.

"You must take it. It is His will. Kiss me, Ishmael, my father, and say you will. God sent you to us when we were fatherless, now we send you to him—your son."

And Ishmael rose and held her in his arms as though she were indeed his daughter, and answered, "Yes."

They went down to see him off, she, Betty and Will. The steamer had to wait till the tide was up, when it cast off. As it made its way slowly down the river the fog that covered the low-lying land along the banks shut out from Ishmael's eyes the wilderness in which by toil, endurance, and self-sacrifice he had won his way to a higher manhood.

CHAPTER III

"SHOW them up," said Barlow. He opened the door of his room for them to enter. They came up the staircase, an old couple; the husband leaning on the arm of the wife. They were too old and frail for work. Clad in the comfortable garb of the well-to-do, they would not have passed for the paupers they were that night. At one stroke all the savings of their lifetime had been swept away; to-morrow they would be stripped of everything—all, save the merely personal possessions the law allowed them, their bed, their clothing. They had no tools of trade, poor souls, even had they strength to use them.

The face the old man raised to Barlow was ashen white; the dry lips moved in mute agony. The woman's face was stained with tears. Even the resolution of her stout heart to speak none but words of hope and comfort to the bent man leaning on her arm could not repress them.

"Barlow!" quavered the old man. "Barlow, we're ruined. Oh, my God! my God!"

The door closed on them.

When it opened again, Barlow's face was as white as the faces of the old couple who feebly made their way down the stairs. At the midway landing he saw them stop; and the woman forgetting everything but the ruin that had come upon him, forgetting that it fell on her also,

turned and kissed the withered face of her man, and bade him "trust in God"—the underlying hope not dead.

Barlow closed the door softly, as if on a scene of death. The lamp was burning on the table. He turned it low and threw up the window, looking on the darkened city with its myriad lights stretching far out like the tentacles of an octopus. It seemed very silent to him to-night—unusually so. Perhaps it was the inner echo of the voices of the man and woman who had just left him, broken and despairing, that made him fancy that he heard under the subdued murmur of the city the sounds of wailing rising and falling, of sobbing, praying.

Only yesterday—only yesterday it seemed, the intervening years swept aside—he stood there in the camp of tents; clean-handed, hopeful, joyous with the strenuous blood in his veins. And he had grown with it, grown with its straggling streets, its rude huts; grown with it till it compassed him about, a noble city. He was as proud of it as if he had built it with his own hands. And he had stood in its midst a man, trusted, honoured. Not one of all these thousands round him but would have taken his word as another man's bond; and to-day!

It was late when he turned up the lamp on the side table, where his books and writing material lay, to sit down and write a letter.

With business-like precision he headed it with the due date, wrote the words "Dear Lyall," and when he had done so rested his head on his hands gazing idly at the paper as if uncertain of the rest. His thoughts wandered till a fact recalled them—the date on the letter before him. With a nervous movement he sat upright in his chair. Fumbling in his pocket for his keys he opened a drawer in the table. From it he took a bulky letter case. It was Barlow's inner sanctuary, his holy of holies; and out of it

he drew an old-fashioned carte-de-visite. It was faded, spotted, but one could still recognize on it a face, a sweet old face—his mother's. He turned it over and read the faint writing on its back. The same month. His mother's birthday this very month. He had written it there himself, long ago.

And Barlow pondered over it, thinking "it is all we have to hang to—just that love holds fast; that somewhere beyond, out there, we meet our dead. The dear old soul!"

There was a quick knock at the door and the handle turned.

"Barlow!"

He gave a start and twisted in his chair, instinctively shuffling the picture under some loose papers.

A man caught in an emotional moment will quarrel with his best friend.

"Lyall!"

The Doctor noted the inflection of surprise mingled with resentment.

"Barlow!" He looked at him gravely, and then with quick impulsive habit put out his hand. "Forgive me. I had no right, of course. I did not know."

Barlow was conscious that his face betrayed him, and the fact added a chill to his words.

"There are limits, Lyall, even to friendship; a friendship such as ours, even."

"It's the sin of impulse, Barlow; and I can't get rid of it. Take my hand, old chap. Forgive me!"

Barlow took it almost reluctantly, but David's warm grasp was not to be resisted, and involuntarily his fingers closed tightly on the proferred hand.

"When I got home to-night I was restless, uneasy. Uneasy about you, and I had something to tell you."

"That's all right. I'm sorry I lost my temper."

"I'd do the same, only a bit more of it perhaps, old man. The fact is," and he looked at him with a quick glance of his eyes, "the fact is I was afraid."

"Afraid!"

Lyall nodded. "Let us smoke!" And as he got out his pouch and pipe he made a gesture as though casting off a restraining garment. "Good old 'bacca. What would we do without it? A fellow seems to see so much better through a cloud of smoke, doesn't he? A decent robe of tobacco smoke corrects the crudity of things—all sorts of things."

Barlow lit his pipe. He knew the Doctor well. These discursive remarks were the prelude to something more relative. By the time they were well into the second pipe David would jerk out the object of his visit. And so it came about. The Doctor related some new anecdotes. He was a gold mine of anecdotes, odd scraps of character, bits of dry humour, flotsam and jetsam of human nature. So little by little he adroitly brought Barlow back to the plane of familiar friendship.

"Old man, I want you to do something for me."

"What is it?"

"Hand it over, Barlow."

"What?"

"Oh, you know very well, William Barlow. I want it!"

Barlow blushed to the roots of his hair.

"We've been almost like brothers, haven't we? You've helped me an awful lot, time after time, just like an elder brother—just like it; and it's all between ourselves—no other soul in the world will know about it. Give it to me, Barlow!"

And the older man, the shrewd, the worldly-wise, looked into the face of the younger man with its expression of

an almost boyish eagerness, a simple earnestness that stamped it truth.

"Why should I?" asked Barlow, leaning back and putting his hands in his pockets.

"Because it isn't right."

The archaic simplicity of the reason, stated so baldly by the round-faced David, struck home to Barlow with an odd sense of humour.

"If you had the running of this universe, David Lyall, the Code Napoleon would not be in it with yours for explicitness. Things that are right on one side; things that are wrong on the other. Thou shalt not steal! Thou shalt not murder!"

Lyall looked at him significantly. "Thou shalt not murder!" He paused, and struck a match to light his pipe. "Not even one's self, Barlow."

"One's own is one's own. My affair!"

"A man's life, Barlow, belongs to his God—and his mother. I don't mean to be preachy, old chap, but you see that's how it strikes me."

Barlow glanced at the table, and saw that the portrait was half exposed. The Doctor had sharp eyes.

There was a pause as they looked at each other. Then Barlow drew a hand from his pocket and tossed a key on the table.

"There you are. Take it!"

"No, old man!" and he shook his head vigorously. "I won't take it. You'll give it to me, clean and straight."

Barlow gave a short laugh, and reaching out took the key, unlocked a drawer of the writing-table and handed over a pocket revolver.

"There! Will that satisfy you? What are you afraid about? Why should I use it?"

"So you didn't intend to use it?" And Barlow was

silent, for he could not lie outright before—before this boy, for he was not much more, whatever his years might say.

David took it and looked at it critically. "Nice little thing, isn't it? I'll keep it for cats. Got heaps round my way;" and he put it in his pocket.

"You might trust me, Lyall!"

"William Barlow, I may be a bit of a fool, but I'm not quite fool enough to trust myself, and I reckon you're not such a fool either as to trust yourself. Half a man's life is spent in dodging himself. While I'm about it I'll have the razors too. A good shave by the barber is about your measure to-morrow. In here?" and he opened the bedroom door, returning with Barlow's case of razors. "Now there's just one thing more I want."

"Don't you think you've had enough? What next?"

"Your word!"

"No trust in me at all, Lyall?"

"When I can trust myself, Barlow,—trust that I am beyond temptation, then I'll trust you. In the mean time I want your word."

Barlow put out his hand. "I give it to you, Lyall."

"That's all right! Now I'm off. No, old chap, I'm not taking any whisky to-night." Still he lingered.

"Barlow, I'm going to take a great liberty. May I see it?" He indicated the portrait, half uncovered on the table.

Barlow handed it to him.

"You are like her—very like her. A good mother is a big thing in a man's life, Barlow—a very big thing. We're only grown-up kids after all;" and he looked at Barlow as brother might look into the face of brother, remembering their mother's care. "When I was a bit of a laddie the mater used to come to my room every night and kiss me.

Likely your mother did the same? Said 'God bless you, my son!' Meant it too. Perhaps the dead come back to us, Barlow. Who knows? Who knows anything? Suppose to-night she were to come back to you—you could take her kiss on your lips and not be ashamed; you've gone down a cropper—an awful cropper—but you're going to face it like a man—that's about what she prayed for. It's about all there is to pray for." He turned and put his hand on the door, then suddenly bethought him of the rest.

"By the way, there's something else I had to say." He felt in all his pockets. It was Lyall's way. He never knew with exactitude where he put anything. "Oh! here it is. Got this letter to-day—found your heiress for you! See, you'd have missed that—if I hadn't come. Good-night!"

CHAPTER IV

CHERRY as she came into the dining-room, returning from an afternoon call, perceived that David was enjoying himself. He had drawn a big easy-chair to the window and sat there chuckling—in seeming anticipation of some coming mischief.

"Why, David! What brings you here at this hour? Are there no more sick calls?"

"Plenty, sweetheart! plenty! but I have a budget of news for you, and just stole an hour for ourselves."

"What are you enjoying so much, David?"

"My dear Cherry, it is a homily—a most exquisite work of humour."

"Why it's one of aunty's sermon-books. My dear David—this between our very selves—I shudder when I look at them. Every Sunday night, David, for years and years, I read out of them."

"I envy you, my dear—positively envy you. They have a subtle sublimated humour about them that quite puts the productions of Joseph Miller, deceased, out of court. I've been saving some of the treat for you, Cherry. This is 'An Homily of the state of Matrimony,' therefore give heed and mark, learn, and inwardly digest the words of the learned and devout writer. 'For the woman,' says this wise man, 'is a weak creature, not endued with strength and constancy of mind; therefore they be the sooner disquieted, and they be the more prone to all weak

affections and dispositions of mind, than men be; and lighter they be, and more vain in their fantasies and opinions."

Cherry had taken off her hat, and stood leaning over the back of the chair following David's quotation.

"And what of the man, David?"

"Oh, this is what he says of the man. 'These things must be considered of the man, that he give not place to the provocation of wrath, so that he ought to wink at some things, and must gently expound all things, and to forbear. For he which will do all things with extremity and severity, and doth use always rigour in words and stripes, what will that avail in the conclusion?'"

"What indeed, poor woman! I suppose that was the attitude men took towards us once—when Auntie Felicia was being trained with a backboard and worked samplers."

"Man from the earliest days seems to have recognized that he wasn't quite up to a woman in an argument—and so in the conclusion he resorted to stripes."

"And in the conclusion, as the homilist tells you, it did not avail."

"I wonder how they made love in those days, Cherry?"

"The man expounded and the woman accepted, I suppose!"

"Heigho! Cherry, my dear!" said David, tossing the book on a table. "It's but poor work trying to keep a merry heart in these days. If it were not for this steadfast haven of the old aunts and the sweetheart within it, I would be by way of making a journey to Bedlam."

She drew a stool to the chair and sat by his side. "I've just come back from a ruined home, David. Disasters like these fall on the old and helpless—that is the most cruel part of it. The young can face the world

again; they have strength and hope and long years before them; but to the men past all work, the women whose folk are dead and whose bit of capital has gone, the thing is irretrievable."

"The old aunts are safe?"

"Yes! Long ago they locked up what they had in Government stock."

"Security and a low rate of interest. The old-fashioned way. We're not content with that nowadays, Cherry. We don't cut our cloth according to our measure, but according to the fashion—and that departure from elementary economics lands us where we are. You said it was hard on the old, Cherry—don't you think it a bit hard on the young too sometimes?" He looked at her wistfully. "The financial backbone has a very bad curvature, dear—very bad."

They were silent for a while. Their marriage-day had been almost in sight—Cherry had "the box" nearly filled—but now!

"Cherry!"

"Yes, David?"

"I—I want to set you free. I have no right to you—I have no home for you. I'm ruined—what little there was has gone in the crash!"

"Do you want to be free, David?"

"Do I want to be free?" he repeated with pained astonishment. "I? Cherry!"

"That's what you thought of me, David. You thought I wanted to be free. The homilist isn't dead yet, I think. Because I am a woman I am weak and inconstant of mind. I am to be set free because I am not fit to fight the world with you, David!"

"Sweetheart! you know it is not that. It is just that what is enough for one most certainly is not enough for

two. That much at least I've learned." And he shook his head gloomily.

"That's just as true, David, as that four hands are twice as many as two. You keep a house?"

"A poor place. The brass plate is out of all proportion. Of course I know what you mean, dear. Cook and sweep in the morning, play Mendelssohn in the evening sort of woman." David shook his head. "I suppose they marry the sort of chaps who follow the plough all day and go home to the higher mathematics in the evening."

Cherry laughed.

"I used to read about that sort of fellow when I was very young—and that sort of girl——"

"Perhaps she's not yet quite extinct, David. We're a bit primitive in the Colonies, you know. I know what it is. You would like to place me above all cares, relieve me of my share of the universal burden. Ask me to be your wife and stop at that. Well, that's not enough for me. There's an old-fashioned word, David, it's not often used now, 'helpmate,' but you remembered it once."

"Saw it in the homily too, my dear, not five minutes ago. It was not far away from 'stripes.'"

"I want to be in your life, David, to help to carry the burden—to be your helpmate. That's what you asked me to be."

"It would be just to make you a servant."

"You have your masters, David, hard ones too sometimes. Suppose I would like to have a master too, but one I can trust and love? Won't you let me have him?"

"Perhaps—when things come round—you know—it wouldn't be so hard on you."

Cherry laughed in his face. "Your bit of a house, David Lyall."

"Yes, it is rather a poor crib," he replied with a trace of disappointment in his voice.

"It's a love of a little house; but just to think I couldn't keep it—now fancy!"

"You wouldn't mind? Are you sure? Perhaps it will only be for a little while."

"David Lyall, Bachelor of Medicine and Master of Surgery, Fellow of this and Associate of that—you don't know everything, sir—and oh dear me! how you do want someone to look after you! There you are with your tie nearly round to your ear. Here, let me put it straight. David, do you ever brush your hair?"

"Every morning without fail. There now, you needn't make it worse than it is. I hate sleek hair that lies down like something waiting to spring at you."

"But yours is always on the fight. Then David—that man, the groom and the rest of it."

"At present, my dear, he is mostly the rest of it."

"You should make him polish the heels of your boots. I wonder, oh, I wonder, what your socks are like!"

"So you will, dear?"

"Will what?"

"Marry me? And you're not afraid?"

"David Lyall—there is only one thing to be afraid of in life—and it isn't the sort of poverty you mean. It's just to be poor of heart. It sounds dreadfully simple, and as old-fashioned as aunt's goffered frills—but it's true. We can never be poor, we two, if we have enough merriment in our hearts to laugh with others, enough pity to share in the sorrows of others."

"There are only a few natural pleasures, physical or mental—the rest are exaggeration or disease, Cherry. That's about the truth."

"Well, we can have them all for very little. What you

can buy, David, isn't nearly as good as what you can have all for nothing. We can never be really poor, David, you and I—never really poor."

But David, though he smiled through dimmed spectacles, still shook his head.

"There is a poverty, dear; may God spare you its touch. I saw it, lived in it for a while, a stranger who only sojourned there; but sometimes I wake at night from a dream of it. Dwell in the heart of it, and a man comes out with a mark on his soul. The grim, hopeless misery of it! and there, Cherry, there where you would think no human love could breathe, I've seen the Christ in rags, divinely compassionate, absolute in sacrifice."

"Where there is love, David, love that is the sacrifice of self, there is God himself."

"It is wonderful that it could live down there in that groaning pit of human misery!"

"Neither poverty, nor misery, pain, nor the wrenching of children from our arms can kill it, David—only self destroys it."

They were silent till David Lyall shook himself and broke out impetuously: "This is a most unworldly sort of business, Cherry—most unworldly. I'm afraid we oughtn't to do it—really. I advise you strongly against it."

"David, I don't think much of your advice on worldly affairs. When we're married I think I'll take them into my own hands—and keep the fee book."

"So you shall, sweetheart. Now mind I've advised you—and you've refused to be guided by me."

"For the first, perhaps—only perhaps—for the first and last time."

"Is that box nearly full?"

"Very nearly."

"My dear little woman!" and he held her close to him. "I'll be a true man to you and do my best."

A ring at the door interrupted them.

"There are aunts!"

"Let us fly to the apple tree. I've wonderful news for you—but it went right out of my head thinking of ourselves."

Under the friendly shade of the apple tree he drew from his pocket a bulky letter.

"Now I'll smoke while you read."

So he smoked, and as she read he watched the changing expressions of her face.

At length—for it was a letter of many pages and the writing not of the clearest,—she put it down and paused. Lyall waited with expectation for her comment.

"It is very wonderful—but I—I do not understand it, David. Do not understand everything, I mean. There is something wanting. Celia was the Hatter's child. Her mother was——?" and she looked at him to supply the missing link.

"Her mother was the Colonel's wife."

"Oh, David!" and he noted with a twinge of sympathetic pain the intonation of the words.

"Perhaps it will be clearer if you recall one evening when you, Barlow, and I sat by the fireside, and he told you a story."

"Was that it? Do you know, David, I have wondered time after time what it really meant. Mr. Barlow was so strange—and you were both so earnest about it, and—and I was so foolish—you made me almost think it was myself."

"Yes!" said David, gravely.

"At last I gave up thinking about it, for I could not believe it was really a story—not Mr. Barlow's." And a faint smile crossed her face.

"And?" asked Lyall. "And?"

"Well, I simply gave up thinking about it. You had some purpose perhaps, but,"—and she looked at him with the tender reproach of love in her eyes,—"I thought it a little cruel of you, David—so unlike you, dear—to make me feel it so, as if I were Elspeth—it hurt me to think you even doubted what I would have done had it been really myself."

Then David, who had seen the matter from his own point of view, realized that in answering Barlow's cynic philosophy, he had wounded the woman he loved. It was so clear to him now that he wondered how he could have thus fallen short of his own standard of decent manhood. He had made a test of her loyalty to the dead, and before another.

"I never thought of it that way, Cherry, never! It seemed to me a great idea then, and Barlow——" he hesitated, lest his words should bear the appearance of placing the burden of his own sins on the shoulders of the absent man—"and Barlow was insistent on having the answer from your own lips."

"Why mine, David?" and she looked at him with strained face—eyes in which lay the dawn of coming light. "Why mine?"

"Because your answer meant everything. To me, Cherry, it meant that my faith in a good woman, faith that loyalty and love were more than all the world could give her, was fixed and true. We thought, dear——"

"Thought—I stood in Celia's place?" The dawn had broken and the full light filled her eyes. "Now I understand."

"We thought," explained David volubly, the point of highest tension passed, the strain relaxed, "we thought, dear, everything indicated that you were the daughter."

"The Hatter's daughter—and that woman's?"

He nodded.

"Would you have loved me less, David, had I been?"

"Lord, no!" exclaimed the surprised David. "Have loved you less, sweetheart; why in Heaven's name should I have loved you less? It was just the thought of it, of a woman taking, jumping at a fortune that was in a sort of way conscience money for—well for her mother's shame."

"You have a confused way of doing things, David Lyall——very confused. Don't you think it would have been better to have told me everything quite clearly?"

"Well," replied David with something of dejection, "it does seem to me now that perhaps you're right—and yet I thought it was such a jolly good idea—and it was such a hoist for old Barlow—dear old chap, Barlow!" he commented, remembering the night he had taken him unaware.

"Still, David, you thought I was in Celia's place?"

"Oh no! I didn't really," and he shook his head decisively. "That was Barlow's idea. He went on proofs, as he called them. I went on human nature. I knew, knew, Cherry—and no proofs in the world could make me believe otherwise—that a mother wouldn't send her own child adrift and put another's in its place."

"Was that why you tried to trace the child?"

"Yes—and——"

"And what?"

"I didn't want the money to come into other hands."

"Carrie's hands?"

"Yes. I hate that woman as much as a man may hate any woman. Geoffrey Merton isn't a bad sort if he only had the love of a good woman to help him, but all the help he had from her was the sort of help you get on the road to ruin."

"Geoffrey was very generous, once he had gained what he desired."

"That is it, dear! Geoffrey was a born fighter—and he fought for one fixed idea."

"Yes?"

"To be rich at any price. It's good to be rich, Cherry. It's a splendid thing to be rich, but it isn't worth the price of a man, body and soul."

"And he thought it was?"

"He had been taught to think so from his childhood. You have heard your aunt speak of it. It was the one lesson his father taught him. He made it Geoffrey's one idea, and money-getting as a sole idea isn't healthy. It has the elements of death in it. It's the development of one part at the cost of all the rest."

"And the father has realized this?"

"Apparently so. It is a strange story."

"What does Mr. Barlow think of it?"

"Barlow says he will want to see the man before he believes it. The boat is expected to-day, so he will not have long to wait. The father is coming by it, I understand from the letter."

"Yes, so Celia says. She has given him her money—the Hatter's money, to meet Geoffrey's liabilities—to save him."

"So the letter says. Ishmael Unit—extraordinary name, isn't it?—coming like some sort of gold god to pull him through—set him up again, put him on his feet." Then he paused. "But he can't."

"Why can't he?"

"Because a bigger God than Ishmael Unit has said No!"

"David! What do you mean?"

"My dear sweetheart," and he told her what he meant.

"There, there, don't dear! it's better that way, far better that way. If Geoffrey lived it would only be a living death."

"Oh, David! David! and his father coming to save him!"

"It's all too late, dear. It was at the other end he could have saved him, not at this."

"I do not understand——"

"Barlow to-day made it all clear to me. It appears that what Geoffrey Merton is his father made him in his childhood. This is just the end of what began years and years ago. You can't undo all that, you know—and it isn't Geoffrey alone, it's all around us. God! to think of it! Just to think of it, what a crop, and all of his sowing!"

"Ishmael's?"

"Yes! Poor wretch! he will go through hell step by step to-day."

"Geoffrey's wife—Carrie!"

"Oh, she has left him! There are women and women, Cherry."

"She's less than a woman, less than human. And is he there alone?

"Yes! Barlow and I tried to get him away from the house to put up with me for a while, but we couldn't do it without violence, and Barlow says we have no right in law to do that. He's not so mad that we dare do that—at least not yet."

Cherry rose quickly.

"What is it?"

"I've made up my mind. I am going."

"Surely not going there?"

"Yes. I am going, David. We were children together, almost brother and sister."

"But you must not, Cherry!"

"David Lyall, I am going!" and the Doctor realized that he would marry a wife with a will of her own.

CHAPTER V

THE Lake house and its furniture were for sale. For days before it had with its contents been open to the inspection of sightseers, of bargain-loving housewives, of gentlemen who, being in the trade, made critical examination of the superb this and costly that, noting the marks on china, testing the texture of the hangings, and discriminating true wood from veneer. The lady visitors were lost in admiration of the panelled silk lining of Carrie's boudoir, and the gentlemen cast envious eyes on the billiard table of the fallen Colossus.

Merton, cornered at last, had been compelled to call a meeting of his creditors. He addressed them at this meeting with the air of one passing through a temporary eclipse that was but the forerunner to a brilliant emergence from the shadow. He was prodigal in promises, all would yet be paid in full, nay, with compound interest. Never had he felt himself more fit for business. The coldness of his reception, the indifference with which the vain-glorious boasts of confidence in his own powers were met, the curious look cast on him, looks full of doubt, not a few of pity, glanced off the armour of his self-assurance. When he slipped in his but half-coherent speech, mouths pursed and eyes narrowed suspiciously; there were under-toned remarks and the quick answering nod. In the decay of fortune the growth of doubt is rapid. The insanity of the reckless adventurer, whose way cynic fortune

often strews with gold, is not so easily detected by the multitude as that of the beggar on the way to the gutter. They follow the fortune of the one, they stone the other as unclean.

"Mad as a March hare!" said one. "Poor devil!" said another with a touch of pity. The unfortunate welcomed him to their ranks; truly time had its revenges. He got a bare "Merton" from them; a month ago they bowed to him as Mister, wrote to him as Esquire; now they became familiar with "Geoff."

There came strange, almost tragic lapses in his memory. The days spent in the great house before it and its glory were swept out of their lives were days Carrie remembered with a shudder till the end of her life.

He would wander round the house calling for his child, forgetful that he was dead full two years. They could not stay him; he searched the building through, persistent that he had hidden in play. One night his wife woke to find him on the balcony repeating the scene of that other night. There was an animal note in his cries that chilled her blood. She grew desperately afraid of him. Daily the physical repulsion increased. He lacked even the elementary refinements of life; one could not sit at table with him, the champing of his jaws as he fed grossly filled one with the sense of disgust. In the end she loathed him as she feared him and fled to a friend's house, to find a cool reception, but at least a room free from the terror of this man who claimed her as his wife.

One day he appeared on Change and bid fabulous sums for whatever stock was offered. The Caller refused to take his bids. He was furious, and had to be removed as gently as might be.

After that episode he rarely left the house. The last of the servants departed, and he remained absolutely alone

in the great mansion of many rooms. A few months of neglect had given the place a forlorn look; the garden beds were overrun with weeds, roses withered on their trees and spattered the soil with petals; rank grass sprang up on the lawns; the carriage drive was trodden by the feet of many who came and went to spy and vilify.

Ishmael's long voyage was ended. Spent and weary, but with a great hope in his heart, a deep trust in the mercy of God sustaining him, he entered Golden City. With little trouble he found his son's fine house. He rang the bell at the great gothic door that opened into the outer hall, and waited patiently for an answer. He rang again, and yet again. At the third summons the door was opened by a belated auctioneer's clerk, who had been completing the long inventory of effects to be offered for sale.

"Mr. Merton? Oh, he's in his room, I suppose. We haven't touched them yet. He's staying on till the sale. No! there ain't anyone with him. Hasn't been for a long time. Doesn't see any one—at least no one wants to see him that I know of. When you drop the brass you drop your friends, mister, don't you? Yes! I 'spose you may go up."

Ishmael passed into the hall. The afternoon sun glowed warmly through the leaded windows, splashing the floor with spaces of crimson and amber. Dust lay heavy on the wilted palms and unswept carpet.

"You will find him up there!" He pointed carelessly at the broad stairway that led upward.

Ishmael mounted it, and wondered which of the many doors that opened off the corridor gave access to his son's rooms. As he went with silent foot on the thick carpet, past the many closed rooms, following the windings of

the passage-way, the loneliness and sense of neglect in the house oppressed him.

Hesitating whether he would retrace his steps and seek further guidance from the auctioneer's clerk, if he had not yet left the building, he stood motionless. As he did so he heard through the partially opened door of a room at the end of a cross passage a tuneless voice chanting monotonously. He turned and knocked at the door. There was no answer, nor was there when he knocked again—this time more insistently. Then without further ceremony he entered.

An unkempt frowsy man sat by the side of a child's cot. As Ishmael entered he raised his eyes with dull inquiry.

The father looked full into the unshaved, bloated face of his son.

"What do you want?"

"Geoffrey!" he gasped feebly. He had pictured something different, and the sight of this squalid creature struck at his heart.

Geoffrey rose, swaying as he did so and grasping the cot.

"Get out of this!" He made a movement as if threatening to follow the words by violence.

"I have come a long way to see you. I am an old man, too old to resist. Surely you will not turn me away without a hearing. I have so much to say."

"You have no business here. Why should you come a long way to see me. I do not want to hear you. Damn it! don't you see this room is private? Who let you in?"

"I found my way here. I heard you—singing."

Geoffrey's flabby face flushed into anger.

"Get out!"

"Not till I have spoken to you, told you why I am

here." There was a quiet insistence in the voice that had its effect on Merton. He sat down with an air of sulky resignation.

"Well, what is it? I'll give you five minutes, then out you get!"

"May I sit. I'm tired. I've had a long journey to reach you, Geoffrey."

"You're familiar enough. Well, sit down and say what you have to say, but cut it short."

Ishmael placed a chair on the other side of the cot, and seated himself. Brought thus suddenly face to face with the improbable tale he had to tell, Ishmael was conscious of its weakness.

"Well!" impatiently.

"Your father——"

"He is dead! Died years ago."

"What proof have you?"

"Proof? Every proof. Barlow, my partner, saw him die, saw him buried."

"If I prove to you that he is not dead?"

Geoffrey looked at him incredulously. "Could prove to me that he's not dead?"

"Yes!"

"You're a liar; he is dead. Now, look here, this is some put-up game of yours. You've heard them talking. Oh, I know what they say! You've heard that I'm a bit off colour; and you think you can play this game on me. You want money—that's it," and he looked at him with cunning comprehension. "Want to make a bit out of me. You say to yourself, here's a poor devil of a mad fool who has more brass than he knows what to do with. And you come here with a fairy tale hoping to put your hands on some of it. You think you can play that off on me!"

"I don't want money, and what I've got to say, Geoffrey, is God's truth."

"A pack of lies, you mean. You don't want money?—you don't?"

"Won't you hear me? You can judge for yourself when you have heard me."

"Very well; say what you've got to say, but"—and he laughed contemptuously—"I'll take my oath you'll want money."

Then Ishmael, painfully and with dry lips, told his improbable tale, hopeless, before it was ended, that it would carry conviction to the man who sat opposite to him with a sneer on his lips, a smouldering fire in his half-closed eyes. When the bare facts had been narrated he dwelt awkwardly, and with a sense of half shame on the inner, spiritual evolution that had been wrought in him by the years of striving in the wilderness. In the days and nights of the voyage he had pictured to himself the effect of this revelation; recited the hot words he would pour into the ears of his son—words that would win back his soul. Solitude and strength breed the fanatic, and Ishmael had their blood in his veins. The hour had come, and the ardour, the impulsive power he had stored in his heart, trickled out in weak impotent words. One touch on his arm, the touch of kinship, one word in his ear, "father!" and the spiritual torrent would have burst its restraining walls and swept away the years between himself and his son. He tried to force intensity, the assurance of truth, into his words and voice; but even to his own ear they carried the metallic sound of artificiality.

"That's a precious thin yarn," commented Geoffrey when Ishmael closed abruptly. "What do you want for it? You brazen dog; why you didn't even worry to find

out the sort of man my father was. To think"—and he laughed ironically—"just to think of trying to palm off a yarn like that on me—as if the old man—to think of it!" He looked at him with scorn. "See, I'll show you the sort of stuff my father was made of. Then you can put a price on your yarn." He rose and went to a secretaire, and unlocking a drawer took out a couple of bundles of old letters. "See these letters? Well, they are my father's! He wrote them to me when I was a bit of a kid—and they make up my Bible, and a real good Bible, too. There wasn't a move on the market the old man didn't drop to. He taught me pretty well all I know."

Geoffrey sat at the table and opened the packets. "Those letters made me." He chuckled as he read extracts to Ishmael. "Here's a bit. 'Take the chances. Take them at any price. If you don't some one else will, and you'll be left!' Here's another bit. 'You can't play at business in kid gloves. When you've got enough you can wash your hands.' That's true enough, isn't it? Why hang it, man, Carrie and I've endowed half a dozen Missions in our time," and again he chuckled. "Lord! Lord! he was a cute chap was the governor. 'There's only one sort of Providence, and that a man makes for himself by getting right on top.' Good! isn't it? Here's another. 'The cant about honesty is bluff to put up the price. Play it for what it's worth.' Real horse-sense. 'When you've got a squeeze on a man, squeeze for all you're worth. A half-killed snake may turn on you.' That's solid truth—solid. 'Never let your grip off a man once you've got him.' 'Leave sentiment to the women and parsons—you'll find no sentiment in the bank ledger.' The old man had a lot of fun in him, hadn't he?"

Ishmael grew sick of heart as the past cast up its

account against him. What had the years in the wilderness profited him?

"Do you know," continued Geoffrey, warming into familiarity as he opened out the letters and re-read the contents of his "Bible"—"do you know, I've often wondered where the old man got it all from. It isn't the sort of stuff you get in books; half the stuff you get in books is made so pretty that you can't get at the inside of it. What I like about these letters"—and he put his hand on the pile—"is the nakedness of them. When you get the clothes off a weed, well you know him for a weed; and when you've stripped a straight upstanding clean-limbed chap, you know him for a man. That's the old man through and through. He gives you life as he picked it up, from the gutter, the street, the office, the Mining Exchange. It's all there—not a rag on it. You just listen to this. 'Success in life depends on who's Boss—the head or the heart. You may put your money on the first all through.' That helps a chap, doesn't it?—clears the way. 'Play the game,' he says, 'and play it for all you're worth.' 'Every time you let a man off you make an enemy. Down him, and you'll have a dog to heel.' That's so, isn't it?" and he looked into Ishmael's haggard face for approval. "'The only kind of dishonour worth talking about is being poor.' That's a rare good letter, that one, full of spice. Here's another bit, 'Charity just means cockering up tumble-downs. They tumble down all the time. They're built that way, and you can't plaster them up with subscriptions.' 'Note: You don't talk about this.' 'Mem.: It's not too bad as an ad.' There's a little bit here about the women. 'God meant women for the home—keep them there.' The old man reckoned up friendship all right. Friends!" He sneered. "This is what he says. 'Don't nose about after friends; you'll find the best in

your pocket.' Now, here"—and he picked out one of the many closely-written pages—"here is what I call the whole scheme of life. You may take any case you like and you'll find at the root of it this rule fits. 'The real secret of success is the handling of others. There's no shame in not being able to do a thing yourself; but there is real shame in not being able to get another to do it for you—cheap.' Isn't that 'cheap' good, eh? True, too—true as death. I've seen chaps sweat the best part of their lives out trying to do things for themselves—then in the end they did them cheap for others. Believe me, mister"—and he waved the letter before Ishmael's eye—"the old man knew, and I know. It's just handling men is the big thing. You don't make much pace by sitting in a cart. It's the team you have in harness makes the pace. What do you think of 'em, eh?" He indicated the letters.

"You believe them?" asked Ishmael, huskily.

"Believe them! Didn't I say they are my Bible?"

"And what have they brought you, Geoffrey? You are a ruined man, disgraced."

"You damned liar! Who's ruined, who's disgraced? I'm a rich man. I'm Geoffrey Merton, the King of Finance; that's what the boys on Change call me. Who are you to say I'm ruined? I tell you I'm rich! I've made half a dozen fortunes, and I'll make half a dozen more. Why, curse it! you come here crawling to me for money—you do."

"I don't want money. I've brought money—money to save you with, to clean your name."

"Clean my name! You! Why the devil should you want to clean my name?"

"Because I am your father——"

"If you say that again I'll throw you out of the window old man as you are. You say I'm ruined, do you; say

that to me, the richest man in this city, in this colony—and I'll be the richest man in the world. Mark my words—the richest man in the world!"

He rose with the grandiose air of the magnate. From the comparative control he had hitherto exercised, the relative sanity of his words, Merton wrought himself into a condition of fury. His tongue slipped and slithered, he ran his words into each other till it was difficult for Ishmael to follow them; and the father in the end realized that this indeed was madness—the madness of his son, the crown of the work whose beginning lay in the flimsy pages scattered on the table.

"Come here!" and Geoffrey took him roughly by the arm and led him to a curtained space at one end of the inner walls. He drew back the curtain, exposing the steel-plated door of a strong room. He unlocked the door.

"Go in!"

Ishmael obeyed him and Geoffrey followed.

"I'll show you if I'm rich or not. Man! there's enough money here to buy the colony, body and soul. See here!" and he opened one of the half-dozen or so deed-boxes on the shelves of the narrow room, dimly lit by a small barred window at the end. "That's scrip, mining stock, proprietary stuff, 'first robber' they call it; none of your coming in with the public for me, my boy. Good as gold; better! for you don't want any gold to run them."

He opened other boxes, briefly indicating their contents. "That's real estate, miles of it. City lots some day. This is going to be a wonderful place—a wonderful place! Chicago won't be in it! Why, it's cram full of minerals; and as for soil and produce, there isn't the like of it on earth. There are millions and millions in these boxes." He banged the lid with a crash. "Not rich! You wait

a bit. You'll see them crawl to me, lick my boots, rig me with all sorts of games, trying to get a bit out of me, same as you are. That truck"—and he pointed carelessly to a collection of jewel boxes of many shapes and sizes—"that's my wife's. Diamonds, first water; paid a pot of money for them. Carrie'd sell her soul for diamonds—so would any woman for the matter of that. Rich! why damn it! she might bathe in them and it wouldn't hurt me."

He took him by the arm and led him into the outer room. Standing opposite to Ishmael he looked at him critically.

"You're a very old man; look like a patriarch with that long white beard—Job or Jeremiah or one of those chaps. What's your name?"

"Ishmael—they called me."

"Ishmael! Queer name. Look here! Tell me what put it in your head to try this game on me—what do you want the money for?"

Ishmael replied with pathetic simplicity. "I came to you because you are my son; and years ago, when you were a boy, I did you a great wrong."

"You did a wrong to your boy, eh?"

"Yes!"

"Did he love you?"

"Love me? Yes, I—I think so—I hope so."

"It's a dirty thing to hurt a child."

"God forgive me!"

"Never mind that. Sit down, Ishmael." He had regained some of his self-control. "Sit down and talk. I had a boy, too; but I didn't hurt him, not I. He loved me, did the little kid—real love."

"You can't buy real love, Geoffrey."

"Well, perhaps not a kid's you can't. Look here"—

and he drew his chair nearer to Ishmael's, and his voice dropped to a confidential undertone. "Does he ever come back to you?"

"He is not dead. You are that son, Geoffrey."

"You've got back on the old game again: you're a mad old fool. Never you mind that," soothingly. "Never you mind my father. If this kid of yours were dead—could he come back, eh?"

"Come back?"

"Yes! could he come back? Look here, man"—and he drew still nearer—"I've seen queer things—queer things. Last night the boy came back, lay in the cot there; just as clear as I can see you now."

"Geoffrey! you believe that—believe that impossible thing; and yet you will not believe me, flesh and blood."

Merton gazed at him with puzzlement. "It's a queer world. I tell you I saw the boy—clear as daylight."

"If the boy could come back, why couldn't I come back—I, your father?"

Geoffrey stared at him vacuously, and for a space there was silence between them.

"Odd, isn't it? Sometimes I—I forget, go right away; then I come back too." He rose spasmodically and shook himself like a dog shaking the water from his coat. "I'm not mad! I'm not mad! Say it, damn you!—say I'm not mad."

Ishmael rose, trembling at the impetuous outburst.

"Geoffrey, sit down, be quiet; you are not mad, of course you are not mad. Sit down!" and he put his hand out and touched him, and at the touch wailed "Geoffrey, my son! my son!"

"You loved this kid of yours?"

"God knows I love him!"

"You'd come back from hell, the devil, the dead, to help him?"

"I have come back. God has let me."

Geoffrey looked at him in half-slumbrous thought, muttering to himself incoherently.

"You've come back! God let you, eh! Well! suppose He let my boy. Suppose He let him come every night to stay with me; let me touch him, speak to him, kiss him. He was sick, the little chap, and I used to kiss him. He used to cuddle up to my neck, so, when the pain got him. He was only a sick bit of a kid, but he loved me—he loved me clean and true. My God! I hadn't got to buy it; he gave it all to me for nothing. Look here, old man, it's a green game about you being my father; he's dead long ago, and you're not like him anyhow. You're a soft goody-goody fool. He was a man who could walk over a hundred of your sort in a day. You're the kind of man that prays and takes kicks. Look here! there are things I don't understand. I don't understand why the boy came back last night. I don't understand your game; perhaps there's something in it, perhaps there isn't." He paused.

"Look here!" and a great fear filled Ishmael as the twitching face and blinking eyes came close and looked into his. "I'm going to make a square deal. You saw all that stuff in there—millions and millions!"

"Yes."

"You go in there and tell Him."

"Tell him?"

"Tell God! tell Him He can have the whole lot, every penny, if He'll let me have the boy to-night—every night till daybreak."

"Geoffrey!" cried Ishmael, aghast at the supreme blasphemy. "You want to—to buy God!"

"Well, why not? How do I know; how do you know? Don't they try to buy Him every day? They're at it all the time."

"But, Geoffrey——"

"Never you mind," and he rose and took him roughly by the arm. "Never you mind! you try it on. Why,"—with a sneer—"if you were my father, you'd try it on like a shot. In you go. Mind! the whole pile for the boy every night."

He thrust him into the strong room and locked the door.

As mechanically he pulled the curtain across the heavy door, his ear caught the sound of voices in the passage way.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN Cherry and David returned to the house they found Miss Hilliard seated in the dining-room, her hat still on and a copy of the evening newspaper in her hands.

"Have you seen this, Dr. Lyall?"

She handed him the paper, at the same time indicating a paragraph. David took it and read. It was a reference to the coming sale of effects at the Lake house, and concluded with a personal comment on the fallen fortunes of its late owner and his present mental condition. It suggested in effect, if not in so many words, that he was without friends, deserted alike by wife and family.

Miss Felicia sat rigidly upright in her chair, her face drawn.

"Did you know of this, Dr. Lyall?"

"In a way, I must confess I did—but Mr. Merton was so popular, had so many friends——"

"So many friends?" The old lady looked at him grimly.

"Well—er—I suppose what is everybody's business is no one's in particular. Barlow and I did see him to-day as a matter of fact, but we could do nothing."

"And you never said a word to me—to us?"

"I've just been telling Cherry. It's a bit difficult you see, Miss Hilliard, to interfere in—er—family matters," protested David with confusion.

"Difficult to do an obvious duty?"

"It's interfering in another man's business, you see," he explained lamely. "Nine times out of ten, in cases of that kind—family affairs—you get a snub for your pains."

"A snub from a poor demented creature!"

"Well, I suppose," said Lyall, hopeless of contending with success against Miss Felicia, "I suppose"—and he rubbed his head—"that is different. What do you wish me to do?"

"Heavens, man! Do you see what that wretched paper says? Has he no friends? My sister's child, no friends! If I were a man, Dr. Lyall, I would flog the man who wrote that cruel odious thing. If my brother, the Colonel, were alive, sir—do you think they'd dare to write like that? Not they!"

Cherry, who had left the room, now returned, ready to depart.

Aunt Felicia leaned forward, her head in her hands.

"Auntie!" and Cherry knelt by the sobbing woman; "you must not!"

"Oh, Doctor! Doctor! can't you save him?"

"Shall we bring him home?" said Lyall tenderly to the old lady.

"David and I, Auntie,—we will bring him home to you. If nothing else can be done, at least we'll have him with us."

When they were in a cab on the way to the Lake house, David, after a long silence, remarked—

"Are you afraid, Cherry? I remember what you said to me once. It is a natural repulsion."

"No—I have no fear; not now that I am needed. I can only think of the old days; Geoffrey, my playmate, my brother in all but blood. We'll bring him home, David. Perhaps it is a home, a true home, not just a great house, he has wanted all the time."

Geoffrey opened the door to them. Lyall noted the eyes bright with excitement, the nervous restlessness that possessed him.

Geoffrey held Cherry's hand in his and led her aside. "He's coming back, Cherry."

"Who, Geoffrey?"

"The boy, of course. Look—don't tell Lyall," this in a whisper. "He's coming back soon—to-night. I'm buying him back." He looked at her curiously. "I'm all right. Don't you look at me like that. Don't do it, I say," and he gripped her hand roughly.

"I don't doubt you, dear," soothingly; "don't hold so tightly, Geoffrey, it hurts a little. So he's coming back—he was very dear to you, very dear!"

He looked at her doubtfully; then let her hand go. "What do you know about it? You'd love me if I gave you cash enough, eh? Then some day you'd give me the go-by—Carrie did. There's this about a kid; he loves you straight—for yourself. My God, Cherry! he was the only thing that ever did love me straight for myself—the only thing I didn't have to buy."

"Hush, Geoffrey—you mustn't talk like that." He himself was as a little child to her.

He sat down by the side of the cot. It was marked in the catalogue: "Lot 341—a child's cot of superior finish, with furnishings." He had carried it to the study himself.

"Coming back to-night. Bought him. Paid a big price."

"A big price, to whom?"

"God! Old chap is fixing it up; calls himself my father; he's praying now and fixing the price."

"Oh, Geoffrey! David!"

"Yes, dear?"

"The father has come."

"Come, has he? I say, Merton, where is he?"

"Oh, he's all right!" Geoffrey looked at them cunningly. "He's safe enough. He's getting back the boy. It's a bargain. He says he's my father. That's all right. If he doesn't fix it I'll kill him."

"Geoffrey! Kill him?"

"Eh, you think I'm queer, don't you, Cherry—a bit off, eh? Well, that's straight enough, isn't it? If he can't bring me back the boy, what's the good of him? What's the good of his prayers?"

"Where is he?" again asked Lyall.

"Oh! that's my business. You want to know too much, Lyall. He'll bring back the boy or——"

Cherry put her hand on his shoulder. "Don't, Geoffrey—you are upset, you want rest. You are coming home with us."

He shook his head doggedly and sat in the chair by the side of the cot.

"He can get the boy back. There isn't anything you can't buy if you only pay enough for it. Look here!" and he spoke in a half whisper, leaning towards them as they stood on the opposite side of the cot. "Look here—there are queerer things in the world than you know anything about." It was getting very dark in the room, and Lyall struck a match to light the gas. "Stop that! Don't you light the gas—wait. You just wait. Cherry, come here; the little chap liked you; next to me he liked you best—never saw enough of his mother to like her. I'll sell her to you, Lyall, for half a sov., and she's dear at that. Come here, Cherry; kneel right down so. Put your face to the rails; listen—now listen! I'll call him!"

Then Cherry passed through an experience that never died from her memory. Lyall also never recalled it without an evil moment.

Geoffrey went to the window. It looked out over the park-land that stretched back from the house.

"Sonnie! Sonnie! Oh, Sonnie!"

Then he returned on tip-toe to the cot and knelt down by Cherry's side. She felt his hot breath on her cheek.

"Listen! listen! Ah there! He's breathing—breathing!" and he pressed his face against the bars. "Softly—softly. Put your hand down, Cherry, here between the bars; he'll stay to-night.

"Geoff, old chap—Sonnie! It's only dad. You've come back, eh? Come to stay. Come back—Oh!" and he rose and shook the cot as if to dash it to pieces. "He's gone!"

Lyall struck a light and lit the gas, two, three jets. There could not be too much light. The tension was beyond human nerves.

Cherry, white-faced, rose from her knees beside the cot.

Geoffrey's face was the face of a fury—blood-purpled with wild unrestrained passion.

"I'll kill him, by God! I'll kill him. Here, get out of the way, Lyall!"

The Doctor stood in front of him. "Merton, be quiet—there's a good fellow! We'll talk it all over to-morrow, when you are yourself again."

"Stand out of the way! I'm going to slit his throat. I don't care who the hell he is—my father or the devil—but if he can't buy my boy back I'll kill him!"

"Geoffrey!" and Cherry clung to his arm. "Geoffrey, come with me. You used to like me once—the boy liked me, loved me—come with me, dear. We will go home together—to the old home, Geoffrey. You remember the old home, dear, don't you?—long, long ago before all this trouble—when we were boy and girl—the dear old aunts! Oh, they want you so badly, dear! Come!" and she tried to lead him by the arm.

"Let go, Cherry! Here, Lyall, out of the way. I'm a bigger man than you, you little bantam cock—you'll stop me?—you?" and he made a savage plunge at him.

For the first time David profited by his wrestling bouts, for as Gregory lunged he caught and tripped him. The burly man lay helpless on the floor with a handkerchief pressed to his face.

"Go down and bring the cabby, Cherry. We'll want him. He's a dead weight to carry."

At the aunts' bungalow the hall door was open and the hall itself filled with light. Halfway down the garden pathway Aunt Felicia—Aunt Tod filling in the background,—met them. The Doctor and the cabman carried their inert burden between them. Cherry went in advance to break the news.

"He was very ill, aunts, and David had to give him chloroform. It was the only way."

They took him up the pathway, through the hall and into the bedroom where, in the days of his boyhood, he had slept untroubled.

As he lay on the bed, the face of his boyhood coarsened out of all remembrance of the past, save to the eyes of love, Aunt Felicia bent and kissed him. She had had no married life, no children; and these two, Geoffrey and Cherry, had filled the vacant space for her, but he was nearer than Cherry, for her dead sister's blood ran in his veins.

And Auntie Tod whispered into Cherry's ear, "It is a sad coming home, dear, but after all it is coming home."

CHAPTER VII

"DOCTOR, I wish to speak to you."

"I am at your service, Mrs. Merton. Take this seat; you are not looking well. Let me send for a glass of wine. May I?"

"Thank you! I am tired, and—I am in great trouble."

David sat at his writing table, looking through the open window at the patch of grass and beds of flowers whilst she slowly sipped the wine. He conjectured the object of her visit.

"It is about my husband I wish to speak to you. I had this letter from Mr. Barlow." She placed it before him. Lyall read it as a matter of form. He already knew its contents. They informed her that the missing heiress to the Hatter's wealth had been found.

"Yes!"

He noted the shade of disappointment or resentment that crossed her face. She had expected at least some expression of sympathy from him.

"I had built so much on it, now that Geoffrey's affairs are so involved. You see it leaves me completely dependent on him."

"Are you then solely dependent on him? I understood, you will excuse my taking mere gossip as authority, that you had some means in your own rights?"

"Every penny I had went with his. Oh! of course, I

know you will call me a fool—or rather think me so, if you don't say it in so many words—but he was so fortunate, and you see I followed his luck."

"And of course you will continue to do so—that goes without saying?"

She looked at him doubtingly, through narrowed eyes, the muscles of her thin lips involuntarily contracting.

"Do you know anything of his affairs?" she asked, without replying to his question.

"Nothing beyond general report."

"Yes! and that is——"

"The position, so they say, is irretrievable."

"He will have nothing left?"

"I should think absolutely nothing."

"Then he will have to start again, fresh, right from the beginning?"

"Yes, right from the beginning."

"This disease he is suffering from—is it quite incurable?"

"So far as medical experience goes there is but the shadow of a shadow of hope for him."

She drew in a long breath. "You know what it means to me, Doctor?"

"What such a thing must mean to every wife, Mrs. Merton."

"If I had been used to poverty—of course, to women like that, you know, used to scrimping and scraping and working all their days, perhaps it's bad, but it can't be anything like what it is to women like me. I've always had whatever I wanted all my life—you couldn't expect me to do that sort of thing. I couldn't; I'm not fit for it. It isn't fair. Geoffrey ought to have made me secure. It was understood, my father understood, that I would be taken care of; and there was nothing he would not have given

me. It's wicked for men to treat women like that. You must see it is wicked. God will punish him."

"I understood you to say that you had means of your own left to you, left absolutely I presume, since you followed your husband's lead. Trustees would not dare do that sort of thing. You'll excuse me if I put it baldly, but you seem to be much in the same boat?"

"How could I tell he was a mad fool?"

"So long as the fool's madness prospered, I suppose he was a good enough sort of fool for you," said David, somewhat rudely, his gall rising at the woman's callous selfishness.

She rose with an attempt at dignity. "Thank you, Doctor Lyall, I think I know all that is necessary to help me. You treat me thus because you think I am without friends—a man's way. Well I am not as helpless as you think—I have a friend. If you see Geoffrey, give him my love, and say that if I thought I could be of any earthly use to him, of course I'd go to him; but I am absolutely useless at nursing, and I know he is in excellent hands. Good morning!" And David, as he held the door open to let her pass, had sufficient self-restraint to repress a good round, forcible expression, the temporary containment of which flushed his face to the point of apoplexy. He recalled her words "I have a friend," and in later days recognized their significance.

At the bungalow Geoffrey was sleeping off, in dull stupor, the effect of the chloroform. They could get nothing coherent from him; the dazed brain refused to make an effort. He lay on the bed breathing stertorously, and Lyall as he looked down at him thought, with the picture of the morning interview in his mind, that after all there might be something to say for a woman linked to such a thing as this.

Neither in the aunts nor Cherry, however, was there any visible repulsion from their patient. The love of earlier years surviving, made them blind to the present fact on the bed before them.

"Let him sleep as long as he can," he advised them, and later on promoted quiescence of body and mind by an injection of morphia.

So two nights and two days passed. On the third night Geoffrey came back from the wonderful dreamland in which he had been wandering. The house was in silence. They had left him for the night. He listened. Not a sound but the tick! tock! of the old clock in the hall. That solemn tick! tock! in the stillness of the night carried him back to his school-days. He remembered how he used to lie awake worrying because he couldn't hurry up Time and reach manhood. Now what would he not give just to be back again—just to redeem the years that had been eaten up, and all for nothing. It seemed to him as he lay there that he had always been going to get something out of life, and somehow the time had never come for it. He thought in a rambling way that if he were God he'd give a man two—at least two, perhaps three—shots at life. You'd know what to do the second time, and it wouldn't always be to-morrow or the day after that you were going to do it. His thoughts, drifting about in the shallows of the past, happened on the face of his father. Then he sat straight up in bed. He remembered the other night. What was it all about, that business? What was it made all his life of late so muddled and confused to him? He bent his head on his knees and gripped it with his hands, trying to bring his wandering wits to bear on what had passed. Then with the sudden leap of a flame it came to him. The man was locked up in the strong room. How long had he been there—days, weeks? He had no idea how time had sped.

He rose in feverish haste, one insistent idea in his mind to go there; to see what had happened. He could not lie abed with that awful picture in his mind—that old man, the mad old fool who called himself his, Geoffrey's, father, dying like a rat caught in a trap.

He turned up the lowered gas-light, found his clothes and dressed rapidly. Once he had to steady himself by holding the post of the bedstead; once faint and with a sense of nausea he sat down on the bed, and saw the room rock before his eyes. His face was cold and clammy, and he closed his eyes for a minute. Then he came to himself again, and the sense of a weakness he could not fight against passed away. He rose and set about his task again.

The window of the bed-chamber opened low down to the broad verandah. As he lifted the sash with exaggerated caution, the cool outer air struck him and braced him for his effort. The moon was up, bathing the garden in white light. He walked with unshod feet along the pathway lest his going should be detected. In the street he only paused to pull on his boots, then hurried with a haste that sometimes broke into an ambling run to reach the great house by the lake. He had the keys in his pocket, and held them there in his hand like a child fearful that by any chance its copper should be lost.

At last he stood in the room whence three days ago he had been taken. The blinds and curtain had not been drawn. The moonlight streamed into it in a broad band that threw the greater part of its space into relief. It reached the curtained wall behind which lay the door of the strong room. Having drawn the curtain back he paused for a few seconds in tense silence, as if through the steel door some sound of life could come to him. Then he fitted the key, unlocked the heavy door and pulled it

outwards. For a moment in the broken light, intercepted by his figure, he could not distinguish anything; then in the dark space beneath the small barred window he slowly outlined something, massed and formless. He must have a light, and as he backed out of the narrow room and drew aside, the moonlight fell on Ishmael's white head lying face downward on the lid of a deed box.

In his hurry Geoffrey had not thought of matches, but he hoped to find some in a drawer of his writing-table. There were none there. Then he felt with enforced patience in every pocket of his clothes, hoping to find the odd one that is so often the resource of the smoker. However this time the odd chance was against him. He sat in the chair at the table and tried vainly to think of any place where a match might possibly be. It irritated him intensely to think that one should feel so helplessly dependent on a match, and this time less patiently he searched again through all pockets, and again without success. He looked askance at the open door of the strong room, and felt a childish fear creeping over him. Action, he told himself, was the only thing to ward it off before it became his master. Rising, and taking his courage in both hands, he went back to the room. He saw the momentary flash of light on the grey hair before his body filled the doorway. Then he went on, and with closed eyes—that curiously involuntary action in the dark—and with set jaws to nerve him to the task, laid hands on it. He thought to touch something cold, but with a feeling half of resentment—the resentment of the senses against the unexpected—his hands gripped a yet warm-blooded man.

The reaction against suspense came to him. If he were alive after all!

"Wake up! Wake up!" He shook him by the shoulder. Ishmael was seated on one deed box, two others

piled before him making a rude table. It was as though he had fallen asleep whilst at some task. As Geoffrey shook him he heard the tinkle of fallen wood on the floor. He raised the old man's head, and underneath it felt the shuffle of loose papers. Thrusting aside the extemporized table he lifted Ishmael in his arms and carried him into the outer room. There he placed him on the leather-padded couch, and with its burden drew it from the wall into the broad band of moonlight. The body was mobile, but as he had carried it out of the strong room he was conscious of its weight, its absolute inertia. It reminded him of a marionette figure when the vitalizing string is slackened and the limbs fall into heaped-up confusion.

Perhaps he was dead; perhaps the God of the marionettes had ceased to pull the string; perhaps the play was over for Ishmael.

Geoffrey drew the couch closer to the window to get a fuller light upon his face. He had read somewhere that the eye was the most responsive nerve centre of the body. From the writing table he took a fragment of blotting paper, and lifting up the closed eyelid drew it across the pupil of the eye without response.

So he was dead—dead without doubt. And this, what did it mean to him? What did it mean? He rubbed his forehead vacuously; drawing down his brows in a vain attempt at concentration of thought. He could remember his coming, something he said about his father. Yes, he said he was his father. His, Geoffrey's, father.

Oh! it must be a dream, some sort of a dream—or some sort of a madness. They had said down on Change that he was mad. It was a mixed-up, muddled-up sort of world—perhaps they were all mad, every one of them.

He pulled his chair to the table and laid his head on his folded arms trying to think it all out; everything

seemed to be slipping away from him, at times words slipped away from him, he couldn't fix the names of the simplest things; at other times his tongue slipped away from him, sliding and slurring; and now memory too was bidding him farewell. What did it all mean? and this business, this coming back from the dead? Was his very soul slipping out between two worlds of the living and the dead?

Dawn came out of the silence and the rest of night, with a long note of pain for the day to be fought.

Geoffrey raised his face, a dull, animal face in which the light of intelligence was blurred and smeared.

The sun came up in scarlet splendour and dyed the room in a momentary flush of colour. He stepped on to the balcony; the fresh morning air and warm touch of the sun, with their note of hope rising above the plaint of the dawn, invigorated him. As he saw things dimly through his treacherous senses it seemed to him that he had come out of a wild, incoherent, passion-filled hell, and shuddered as he thought that perhaps he was but tarrying a little while till he should return to it. The only light in it, in this confusion of thought and memory, was the boy.

The old man had gone home to his dead. The boy would never return, never! How could he? Then with a quick spasmodic gesture he gripped his hands together, and his face grew cunningly wise. Of course that was the way out of it all—that was the way. Fool that he had never thought of it before till this old man—his father, so he said—showed him the way.

He went into the strong room to get it. It was hid away there. It had brought him spaces of peace time and again—bits of Heaven in every drop of it. His hand shook nervously as he sought the case. It was among Carrie's jewels. At the clumsy movements of his hands

the pile of glittering things she used to wear came tumbling out of their velvet-lined boxes and scattered on the floor at his feet.

As he turned to leave the room he saw the sheets of paper on which Ishmael had been scrawling when his head went down in death. Picking them up he carried them to the room.

He looked at the pages in half dazed curiosity, reading dully till some words stirred his inert faculties into momentary vigour.

In the long hours of his endurance, with the pain of want of food and drink consuming him, Ishmael had written in straggling words and half intelligible sentences a record of his life, the explicatory prayer of a man at the feet of his child—a prayer wrung out in sweat and agony to a soul he had damned. There was a break in the record of self-abasement near its close. It told in quaint biblical parable how, in the last long night when he could not rest for the awful thirst that parched his lips, mouth and throat, the Law spoke to him out of the darkness and bade him remember the planting of the corn, and the ripening and the harvest, and how corn sowed was in due season corn reaped. Each of its kind bore of its kind, corn of corn, tares of tares. And of men's souls was it not the same? The seed in the soul of the child bore fruit in the soul of the man—fruit of its kind. And, wrote Ishmael, writing large, "This is the Law."

Of all that Ishmael wrote Geoffrey his son read little, could with discernment grasp little, save that this must in truth be his father and the Law had spoken to him. He thought it over slowly, dully, but in the end grasped its meaning, the beginning and the end of things, the working of the Law.

So this was his father, as he himself was the father of

the little chap! He sat by the dead man's side, and smoothed the grey hair back from his forehead, and bent with a great throb in his heart to kiss the brown, wrinkled face—his father; and he must have loved him—must, as he, Geoffrey, had loved the child.

The city pulsated with the current of waking life. The distant sound of the stampers crushing out the gold from its resistant matrix hummed in the air with the drone of bees in their hive. They sang the siren song of the gold field, and Geoffrey heard it, but paid no heed to it. He had "made his pile."

He sat by the dead body till the last faint glow of warmth had left it, reading listlessly odd scraps from the pencilled manuscript; trying to piece the story of Life and Law together. Then he thought again of yesterday, the yesterday of madness, of this odd gleam of light to-day—and to-morrow—but there would be no to-morrow. He was tired—he would go home to the great rest, the infinite peace, to wake—yes, perhaps to wake with the boy's face shining on him. He rose feebly. It seemed to him that he had grown very old in this last hour. He took the phial from its case and poured the contents into a glass. As he held it to the light it was clear and sparkled like Carrie's diamonds; he saw them shimmering on the floor like a pool of water, with here and there a drop of blood-red ruby. Then he drank to the Law—the Law that never forgets, never forgives. In a grim spirit of irony he threw the empty glass among the jewels, where it splintered into fragments, its worthless particles scintillating in sham similitude to the sham riches with which they mingled. He laughed mirthlessly as he thought of it all. To have lived for that and its kind! Turning he went to the open window, and raising his arm as if warding off the sense of age upon him, he drew in a deep breath of the sweet, clean

air; then stood for a space looking out on the trees, the grass, the flowers, fragrant and sun-filled.

A little while and Geoffrey, feeling the sweet sense of eternal sleep creeping over him, went back to the couch and lay at its side, pillowing his head against his father's breast. He drew the dead man's arm around his neck, and holding it there, close to him, flesh of his flesh, fell asleep.

So Ishmael gathered in the harvest, as the Law had said!

On the broad verandah of their home in the wilderness Celia and Will stood that morning looking far out across the sunlit fields. The corn was ripe, ready for in-gathering, —a rich, golden harvest.

"Do you remember the evening he came here, Ciss?"

"Yes, dear."

"Away out there lay the scrub. He came down the track where the road is now. I remember I was a bit scared of him."

"He was that tired he could scarcely stand," she added. "Ned was for sending him away. We were all for sending him away, because your father had warned us against swaggies—mostly no good he said."

"Ned told me it was you persuaded him."

She shook her head. "It wasn't me really, dear."

"What?"

"You and Betty were saying your prayers, Will, and somehow it seemed to me, sudden as it were, what's the good of all this saying things if we don't do something real, earnest-like?"

"Like what?"

"Helping, giving chances. There was Ishmael, begging for just a chance, and we weren't for giving him any chance

at all; and yet, Will, we wanted a chance ourselves ever so much, because we were here alone, just children. It didn't seem right, as you little ones were asking Christ to help us to a chance, not to give one ourselves to Ishmael."

"Hum!" said Will. "Seems fair, don't it?"

"Dr. Rockleigh says the Law—the working out of things, you know—doesn't reckon on chances. It goes on to the end—a bitter end mostly, it seems."

"A bit rough on us all—a bit rough, I should say. Most of us want chances, Ciss, over and over again."

"That's what Christ meant," said Ciss, in reverent elementary faith. "Giving us all a chance to make up for the past. So we gave a chance to Ishmael."

"Lord God! aint he repaid it too!" said Will with an intake of the breath. "Look at it, Ciss!" enthusiasm springing into his young eyes. "Look at it!" and he spread out his hands towards the great sea of rustling corn. "Just think of the doing of it. A man's work, I say, a big man's work, a true man's work. Won't he be proud when he comes back. It will be the biggest harvest we've ever had, Ciss; like a great gold crown to a man, topping up his chance. When he comes back—— "

"When he comes home," she corrected gently, "Ishmael, our father!" and Will put his arm around her neck, as if he were a child again, and kissed her. "When he comes home—bringing his son with him."

CHAPTER VIII

"LOOK, David!" She was seated, bareheaded in the morning sunlight, in the stern of the boat that Lyall pulled across the lake. As she drew her hand across her thick hair he saw a grey strand marking it.

"We have waited a long time for this morning, sweetheart. Is it a reproach?"

"Not a reproach, only a—a suggestion, dear, that time runs even for lovers. How much longer would you have waited, David?"

"Cherry, it was only that I wanted to make a home for you."

"So we would have drifted into middle age—old age, what you medicine men call 'senile decay,' waiting for more chairs, tables, and carpets. You're an awfully foolish man, David."

"My dear girl, mated to Minerva one does not need wisdom in one's own proper person."

"Cherry Minerva suggests some sort of quack medicine, doesn't it, David?"

"It does," said David, taking a rest, and rubbing his stubby hair, now peppered grey, with a florid handkerchief, a recent purchase from an Afghan hawker in alleged distress. "It does. Might advertise it by a testimonial, 'since taking Cherry Minerva, I take no other.'"

"Well, I hope not, David; one wife at a time, if you please. Let me have the sculls."

"Certainly," responded David cheerfully. "That's the spot, dear. I've been shepherding them for a week." He indicated a thin break in the margin of reeds, beyond which lay a pond. Cherry, with the skill of an accustomed hand, drove the skiff through the tall rustling reeds. It floated into a pond covered with water-lilies, flat-leaved and flecked with white blossoms. David leant carefully over the side of the light boat, and cutting a handful of the finest flowers laid them on her lap.

"That's the wedding bouquet, Cherry."

"You ought to have waited another year or two, David, then you could have bought something on wires from a florist," she said, with a laugh of happy content.

They let the boat drift among the lilies and looked down into the green-shaded water, where the silver-scaled fish swam lazily among the long succulent stems. Whilst the boat drifted among the blossoms and floating leaves they talked of what David called "things," but poets describe more felicitously. They were happy, passing the happiness of everyday lovers.

"Gracious!" exclaimed Cherry, with a start. "We'll be late. Now, David, put your back into it."

"And my heart as well, sweetheart, for we are near the end of our journey." They thrust through the circle of reeds into the open waterway, and half a mile further on Lyall brought up the skiff at a jetty of saplings that jutted a few yards from a grass-covered bank. As they landed they saw the clergyman coming down the track to meet them. His church of brick, half covered with ivy, peeped at them through the swamp oaks.

"Ah, Lyall! Couldn't be punctual, even on your wedding morning!"

"The woman tempted me," said David with a laugh; "so we dallied."

"Well, come along. The wife's at the organ and the generally useless boy at the bellows, and all's well," said the Rev. McChristie, a cheerful, white-haired clergyman, who eked out a modest stipend by the produce of a "milker" and a vegetable garden.

As they entered the tiny church the proportionately tiny organ gave a doleful wheeze—something had gone wrong under the hands of the generally useless boy—and then burst into voluntary of a kind, for the organist's skill as a musician was not equal to her greatness of heart.

At its conclusion Cherry and David went up to her for a chat.

"We're the procession and the wedding guests, and the bridesmaids and the best man, and also the bride and bridegroom in one," remarked David, with a laugh.

"Dr. Lyall!" said the organist, a brown-faced, blithesome little soul. "You're just the oddest man, and the dearest——"

"Please—mustn't!" and Cherry held up a warning finger. "He's mine now, or will be in five minutes. All mine!"

"Well, go along and get married, and—and—God bless you both!" and the little organist, with tears of sympathy in her eyes, saw through their haze the two kneel at the altar and make their vows.

The organ wheezed again, then broke into the "Wedding March," and down the aisle, the bride carrying her bouquet of water-lilies, came the newly wedded pair.

In the porch they waited until the clergyman and his wife joined them, and together they strolled to the water side.

"Good-bye. Now then, wife, get into the boat."

"All right, husband," and Cherry pulled her skirts trimly about her and stepped in.

"David, I'll commence well. I'll take the lines," said Cherry.

"And I," replied he,—"I shall also begin at my appointed task, and toil at the oar."

The clergyman and his wife enjoyed the joke so much that they went along the pathway leading to their home hand in hand, and the grey-haired, red-faced man stopped at the garden gate, after a precautionary glance round, to kiss the little grey-haired, brown-faced woman.

"Seems like yesterday, Mary, doesn't it?" and she looked up at him—for of the two he was a trifle the taller—and answered—

"It's the quiet happy years, dear, that have just slipped away till it only seems like yesterday."

At the aunts' bungalow great preparations—quite out of proportion to the number of guests—had been made. The dining-table had been carried out and placed under the broad-spreading foliage of the apple tree, whose leaves were not yet fully dry from the night dew. Aunt Felicia's choicest napery adorned the table, and Aunt Tod's loveliest roses were grouped in a great centra bowl.

Aunt Felicia was groomed to her finger tips, the descriptive term fitting her somewhat masculine order of femininity. The frills of her cap were goffered to a severe perfection that must have been the high-water mark of the art of goffering. Her grey silk dress was relieved by a wonderful piece of old Indian lace, and a gold brooch of the solid, unæsthetic, early Victorian period. Aunt Tod's festival dress was somewhat similar, except that it lacked the suggestion of precision in the elder sister's. Her ample figure did not lend itself to lines of severity. William Barlow, looking the worse for the wear and tear of the times, was the sole guest. He was not as well set-up as in

the ante-boom days, and his manner had lost much of its old self-assurance.

The bride and bridegroom, having walked home from the lake, lingered for a while in the hall. It was deserted, and David still had more "things" to say; consequently, when Aunt Felicia surprised them by a sudden entrance, Cherry, with flushed cheeks, had trouble in getting free from David. "He was such an awkward man," she declared.

However, Aunt Felicia was diplomatically blind, and they hurried off to the breakfast under the apple tree with the assumption of a perfect nonchalance—too obvious to be true.

Barlow found an opportunity to present his wedding gift, an old-fashioned-ring, his mother's; and Cherry, as he placed it on her finger, saw with woman-like delight the brilliancy of the stone, but gave it, too, another and a higher value.

"You may kiss me if you like," she said; and William Barlow did, whilst David laughed in assured confidence.

It was a simple dainty meal—Bridget, who was amazingly bedecked, saw to that—and when it was over Aunt Felicia brought out the Colonel's sword, and hovered over Cherry like a guardian angel as she cut the cake with it.

Then Barlow rose and proposed the health of the bride and bridegroom in a neat, brief speech, and David replied in a speech equally brief, but all ragged edges.

He wandered round to Barlow and shook him by the hand and said, turning to the little company—

"There's just one thing more I've got to say, and it's about our friend Barlow here. By the way, he's not finished that precious story of his yet, Cherry. What I've got to say is this—Yes, I will, Barlow, you let me alone.

It's this. Now charge your glasses—bumpers! To-day William Barlow pays the first dividend in his estate—like a man. Like a man, I say. Look here, old chap, if there were enough of us we'd give you a cheer; but we mean it, don't we, Cherry?"

"I never thought Mr. Barlow would do anything else," remarked Cherry, coolly. "And I altogether fail to see what you want to make such a fuss about it for, David. Of course Mr. Barlow will do just what is right."

"Well, I thought you'd like to know," said David apologetically, being somewhat crestfallen. "Why, I think it's a big thing for a man to pay a dividend—it's more than many a mine does anyhow."

Barlow hastily turned the conversation.

"We all know the Doctor, don't we? That's all right. By the way, I've got something in the way of business for you young folk."

"Nearly young," corrected Cherry, with a mischievous glance at David.

"Barlow, my dear fellow, this is no day for business. I couldn't put an ounce of heart even into pulling a tooth to-day. Put it off till we come back."

Barlow shook his head decisively.

"You see, Cherry, it's the end of the story."

"Oh, well! Let's have it," assented the Doctor with a sigh.

Barlow took a paper from his breast pocket, the neatly folded and endorsed sheet that suggests matters legal.

"You will remember that we were in search of a lost heiress. Well, she was found—but you know that. Now, the heiress, having come into great gear of gold and silver, cast about what she should do with it. She had at first a great purpose in her mind, but God willed it otherwise. So, being just a simple woman, the idea came to her—the

first being at an end—that if she cut it in two, it would be easier to deal with the half than the whole—a conclusion wholly justified by woman's logic. You will note the truth of this later on, you two, if you spend nineteen shillings out of a pound; then the labour of investing the odd shilling is infinitesimal."

"Quite in Barlow's old form—eh, Cherry?" interpolated David.

"To come to the root of the matter, I have prepared by instruction from my client, Miss Celia Hawkins, a settlement of a moiety of the estate real and personal devised and bequeathed to her by her father, now deceased, colloquially known as 'the Hatter,' upon her foster-sister, Cherry Maywood, now Cherry Lyall."

"The deuce you have!" exclaimed David, in wide-eyed amazement; but Cherry was silent and suspiciously collected. "Why, Cherry, you're quite rich! Look here, little woman, did you know anything about this?"

"Oh yes," replied Cherry, taking a bunch of raisins from the dish, "of course I did, David."

"And you never told me, sweetheart?"

Cherry ate a raisin before she answered him, doing it not of rude intent, but that she might deliberate an answer.

"Now do be reasonable, David. Sit down, there's a good man. Of course I knew it! How could Mr. Barlow write out his nice clean paper, with its little red seals, if I didn't know all about it. Celia asked me if I minded, and of course I didn't mind; I'd have done just the same. But tell you! Good gracious, David, you'd have fretted and fumed, and put off getting married for another year at least, just on account of some foolishness about its being my money. As if I cared whose it was, so long as we had it—we two."

"You see, Doctor," said Barlow, shaking his head,

"you've got such a queer, ungovernable sort of conscience that we didn't know what would happen if we let you know."

"Now you're married to a rich woman, David, you'll have to make the best of it," said Cherry, with an odd little laugh.

"It's settled tight on her, Barlow. Eh?"

"Oh yes. Tight as can be."

"No rascal of a husband can touch it, I suppose?"

"Not a copper of it."

"Then,"—this was scarcely fair to Cherry,—"I'll—well, I'll make the best of it."

"Thanks," said Cherry, demurely.

"Pass the apples, Lyall. You can't say the woman tempted you this time."

"Pooh!" said David.

"It's a good thing you've married a woman who knows you," remarked Cherry, as they laughed at the doctor's *gaucherie*.

"The carriage is at the door, miss," announced Bridget, in a loud whisper to Miss Felicia.

David heard it and smiled broadly.

They rose and left the table to wait in the dining-room for the return of the bride, who had to attend to some feminine apparelling. Aunt Tod accompanied her, and presently David went out to see to the "carriage" arrangements. Thus it happened that Aunt Felicia and Barlow were left alone.

"William Barlow."

"Yes, Miss Felicia."

"How much was it?"

"Was what?"

"The dividend, of course."

"Well," and Barlow hesitated with a little touch of

confusion, "it was a poor thing, a very poor thing, but mine own."

"How much?"

"The precise sum was—er—sevenpence ha'penny in the pound."

"Sakes, man! Sevenpence ha'penny? It will take you two lifetimes to pay it off at that rate; and you're not so young, William Barlow."

"I'll pay all I can in this life, Miss Felicia; perhaps after that I may cry quits, or work it out somewhere."

Miss Felicia looked at him full and earnestly, then she put out her long-fingered, silk-mittened hand and touched his arm.

"William, you must let me help."

"No, no; not a cent. You must see I couldn't—couldn't positively. It's tremendously good of you; but you must see I couldn't."

"William, once there was a time when—when it might have been different; when I could have had a right to help. That's a long, long time ago, and it's quite too late now. Just for the memory of it, William, couldn't you let me help?"

He shook his grey head slowly, though decisively.

"It would take every ounce of pride out of me, Felicia; it would leave me slack and mean."

"Perhaps,—perhaps it wouldn't do; but it would have been so much to me, just to have helped a little."

He took her hand and raised it to his lips impulsively.

"Felicia"—and he found it hard to speak—"it isn't possible—not possible at all; but bless you from the bottom of my heart for thinking of it. You—you don't know how much lighter it makes the way for me—the right sort of way, you know—just for what you have said."

"Cherry, Cherry," called the Doctor, bustling in. "Come along quickly, or we'll have the whole town here. There are six boys already on the kerb, wondering if we've got a circus come to stay with us. Hurry up, there's a brick!"

Cherry came with one arm round Aunt Tod's neck, the hand of the other clasping a bunch of roses.

"Very well, most impatient of husbands. Good-bye, dear; good-bye, Aunt Felicia, and you, Bridget. Kiss the cat and the canary for me. David says there shall be no more cats or canaries where we are going to."

Then they went out and mounted to their seats, David taking the reins, with Cherry seated at his side.

As the aunts and Barlow walked back to the house, when the "carriage," having turned a corner, was lost to sight, Barlow remarked—

"It wouldn't be possible to any man but David Lyall to plan a honeymoon roaming round the country in a tilted waggon like an itinerant hawker."

But Miss Felicia was lost in thought. She turned suddenly on Aunt Tod.

"Tod, my child, what was the Greek gentleman's name?" But Aunt Tod had forgotten it years ago and stared at her with lack of comprehension.

Barlow, however, who had a long memory, recalled the incident when the Greek gentleman's views had been discussed.

"Epicurus, long time deceased, Miss Felicia?"

She nodded, satisfied.

"I'm more than ever of late convinced that there was something in what he said." Now what he had said, and whether there was anything in it or not, was the blankness of blankness to Aunt Tod; but to Miss Felicia it conveyed a notion of simple eating, simple drinking, and simple

living, and she was praying in her old heart that the riches which had come to those who took the place of children to her would not prove the snare of the first generation.

It was springtime and the days were yet short. At mid-day David called a halt for luncheon. "The caravan," as he dubbed it, was drawn up at a break in the trees, where, far below them,—for they had been climbing upward for the greater part of the journey,—they could see Golden City and its shining lake in the distance, held in the cup of the hills. The only cloud they saw that day was the haze of smoke above the city. Long since the beating of its myriad stampers had been left behind, and lying peacefully in its setting of neutral green bushland, it looked here far remote from the highway of strenuous life. It was at this point, lazing in the young lush grass sap-filled with the winter rains, that David remembered he had some correspondence by the morning post, hastily read and thrust into his pocket.

One of the letters he passed to Cherry without comment, and when she had read it she let it lie on her lap, and looked again—but with graver face—on the City far below at her feet.

"Well, sweetheart?"—and David broke her silence.

"I am glad, dear. It was Celia's wish."

"Yes! I'm glad of it, too. Somehow one seems to think—of course it's absurd—but one thinks they will rest happier there in the wilderness, Ishmael and his son."

"There was good in Geoffrey; oh, a great deal of good, David. If the child had lived, perhaps—perhaps the hand of a little child might have led him."

"Out of his wilderness, eh?"

"Yes. I suppose we all have a wilderness of our own."

"Get bushed there sometimes, eh?"

"Or sometimes, David, make a garden there,—a great glorious garden,—by striving and loving, as Ishmael did."

They were going on to a little township in the hills, high up in the crisp mountain air. It would be night before they reached their destination.

Late in the afternoon, when still travelling upward they reached the tableland, David turned the waggon off the winding track, and selected a cleared well-grassed spot for their teatime camp, whereat the waggon horse rejoiced exceedingly, for in the prose of enduring toil the weight of brides and bridegrooms differs not from the weight of other mortals. The camping-ground was near a gully where a creek ran fresh after recent rains. In the quiet evening air it tinkled like a bell, as it rippled over the water-worn rocks that later on in the dry days of summer would be a series of pot holes. David said it was ringing their wedding chime.

The horse, thankful for such temporary relief, was taken out of the shafts and hobbled, Cherry helping to unbuckle the harness. He shook himself with a mighty shake before settling down to his meal.

Then David gathered wood, and Cherry, taking the quart pot, went for water to the creek down the gully.

David had built a roaring fire ready for her return, and now rested from his labour to watch her coming up the hill, singing as she came, her big sun-bonnet open at the neck and her sweet womanly face framed in a riot of wind-blown hair escaped from bondage.

The fire crackled and flamed, the odour of burning grass-tree gum scenting the air with incense. David raked a nest of glowing embers in the fire and grilled the chops, whilst Cherry boiled the billy and made the tea.

And afterwards they sat together, watching in the bush-born way the embers of the fire as they formed

pinnacles and caverns, cities and mountains of red glowing gold.

"God is in His heaven to-day—for us—surely!" remarked David irrelevantly. He felt the soft pressure of a hand in his for answer, and a sweet voice whispered in his ear, "Every day, my husband, every day."

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